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THE MAGAZINE OF Fantasy & Science Fiction

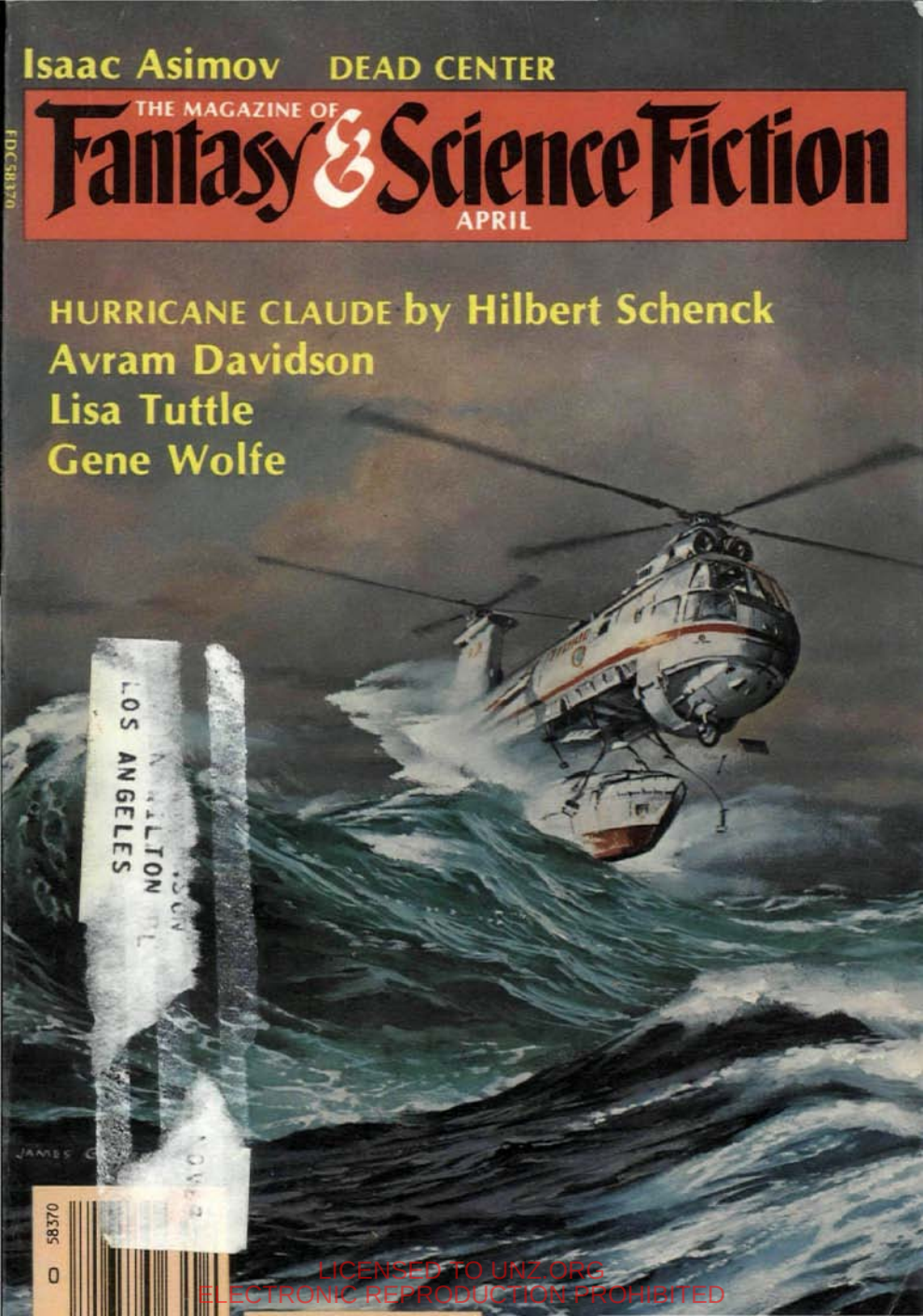
APRIL

HURRICANE CLAUDE by Hilbert Schenck

Avram Davidson

Lisa Tuttle

Gene Wolfe



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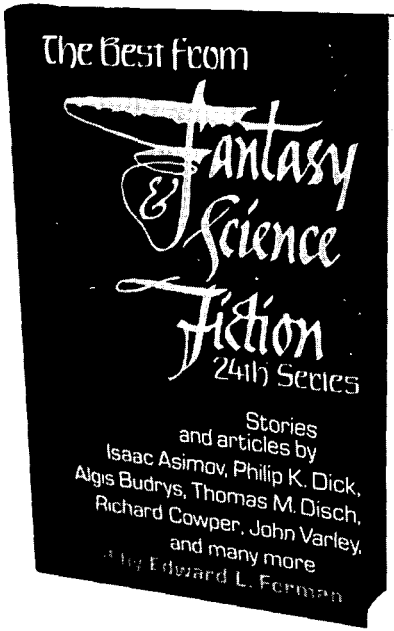
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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (ISSN: 0024-984X), Volume 64, No. 4, Whole No. 383; Apr. 1983. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.75 per copy. Annual subscription $17.50; $19.50 outside of the U.S. (Canadian subscribers: please remit in U.S. dollars or add 20%.) Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices.

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Hilbert Schenck has written several fine sea-going SF stories for F&SF, most recently, "Buoyant Ascent," March 1980 and "The Battle of the Abaco Reefs," June 1979. His new story is about a group of ocean engineers and their attempt to stop a gigantic killer storm that is running north at over 40 knots, headed for Long Island...

Hurricane Claude

BY

HILBERT SCHENCK

Sept. 5, 1400 hrs. — Sept. 7, 1700 hrs.

At its moment of conception, the storm was no more than an unnoticed, swirling tube of air, its father a rising current off the northern edge of the largest island in the Caicos group, its mother a thin barometric-depression wave lying east and west across the southern limits of the Bahama Banks. The upward-moving thrust of buoyant air, penetrating the mild depression and gaining energy from it, set a kink in the pressure wave, a bend that eventually closed itself and created a turning cylinder, an atmospheric swirl. The tiny product of this gentle meeting, driven by that ponderous force derived from the rotation of the planet itself, began to rotate in a counterclockwise direction, and this spin rapidly drew in more energy and moisture from the hot, surrounding sea. Its mild and almost-indetectable parents were consumed and destroyed during its first few hours of life as the baby storm drifted on an erratic northeast track out over the deep but unusually warm waters. By chance, no reporting vessel passed through the blustery but unfocused center of its babyhood, so the storm grew unnoticed for almost a day.

Then, that next afternoon, a large American sailing yacht, *Passage-Master*, Norfolk to Puerto Rico, ran through the western sector of the tiny, diffuse storm. Winds were moderate, no more than twenty knots, but there was a heavy sense of tropical disturbance and moisture, and the sky was very dark. The barometer dipped two-tenths of an inch of mercury over a three-hour traverse, and *Passage-Mas-*

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ter's professional skipper spoke over the ship-to-shore with Miami around suppertime. The next morning, Miami Hurricane Center dispatched a hunter aircraft, and it located the storm out in the Gulf Stream, where the hot surface water fed the young hurricane-to-be its continuous, ever-increasing, energy requirements. The storm was still invisible from the synchronous weather satellite, *Nimbus IV*, masked by a larger fan of high altitude cloud, but the aircraft made a run through the storm center at about 10 A.M. and found a well-defined circulation, almost half an inch of gradient across the storm cross-section, and winds now over forty knots.

At noon that day, four men in shirtsleeves met in the Miami Center and studied the records and maps. The storm was now growing in area rapidly and also extending itself vertically upward into the atmospheric column, so that the *Nimbus* cameras were beginning to show a typical spiral cloud pattern, imposed on the older, more passive cloud structures overhanging a vast middle Atlantic low-pressure region. They named the growing baby Claude, since it was the third rotating storm of the season, and its predecessor, which had fizzled south of Cuba, had been called a lady's name, Barbara. At 1300, Miami issued its first bulletin on Claude.

"Tropical storm Claude is now located at approximately 25°1' north latitude and 71°5' west longitude, or approximately 400 miles east of Miami. The storm is strengthening in both barometric gradient and size and its movements are erratic. Maximum wind velocities of 40 miles per hour are now concentrated within 50 miles of the storm center, but further strengthening is to be expected. All marine interests are urged to remain informed about Claude, which has the potential of becoming a large and dangerous storm."

By 1500, Claude had begun to move sluggishly almost due north at about five miles an hour, and Miami established a tropical storm watch along the Atlantic coastline north of Wilmington.

The board of directors meeting at Techoceanics had not been hastily called until around noon that day, but by 3 P.M. the men from Boston and Hartford had arrived by car or charter plane and over a dozen people were assembled in Techoceanic's spartan conference room. The company owned a series of Butler-type metal-sided buildings located mostly on barges moored next to the swing bridge connecting New Bedford to Fairhaven to the west. When not used for meetings, the room doubled as a meteorological work space and one end was filled with electronic racks.

Ray Alexander, chief of research at Techoceanics, was a small, very thin man, almost sixty, his hair a stiff, white, crewcut brush, his eyes hooded and cold, his mouth no more than the

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dark cut of a sharp knife. "Let's get going," he said in a loud, hard voice. "We've got a storm and it's growing. Come on, you people, shut up!"

The two business-suited men from the Hartford underwriters looked up startled from their private discussion, then lapsed into sullen silence. "Okay, Bettina," said Ray Alexander in almost a snarl, "work your magic," but his tone was completely sarcastic, with no sense of joking or kidding.

Dr. Bettina Holbrook, for two years the forecasting meteorologist for Techoceanics, was a plain-faced, thirty-year-old woman in tailored slacks and a severe, simple blouse, entirely trim and businesslike. She stood up to fire a look of pure hatred at her boss, then flipped off the lights and turned on the slide projector. "Okay, here's Claude twenty minutes ago...."

But Ray Alexander let out a snort of disgust and muttered loudly, "Claude! Those raving faggots in Miami sure do like the fruity names!"

Bettina stopped speaking at once and turned an angry white face to peer at Ray Alexander. "Do you really want to shoot yourself in the foot, Ray?" she said in an icy, distressed voice. "What sense is there in making that kind of sick, stupid crack, anyway?"

"You going to give a weather briefing or a gay rights lecture, Bettina?" snarled Ray right back.

Tall and angular Dr. Cora Alexander, chairman and chief executive officer of Techoceanics, spoke even more coldly than her husband. "Ray, if you make one more comment about fags, fruits, queers, or whatever, you're out of this thing on your ass! I mean that, you bastard! We don't need your nasty cussedness, Ray. Moke can pilot the *Telsa*, and probably better than you!" Where her husband's face was simply thin and spare, Cora Alexander's face was thin and extravagantly ugly. Her downward-hooked nose and her upward-hooked chin almost met in front of a huge, wide mouth that often snapped open to show large, tobacco-yellowed teeth.

Ray aimed a sharp finger-point at his wife, sitting at the other end of the long table. "You'd like to cut me out of it, wouldn't you, you old bag! After four years of shoveling shit against a tide of stupid incompetence, I get tossed into the street...."

The man from State Street Trust turned to the Boston lawyer sitting next to him and raised his eyebrows in pointed astonishment. The old attorney, Arthur Goodspeed, whispered, "Things here are worse than we heard. They must be going to shout the storm to death," but the banker just shook his head ominously. Techoceanics was into them for over $2 million.

Cora paid no further attention to Ray, but turned to nod impatiently at Bettina Holbrook, who reset her face in as pleasant an expression as possible and indicated the projected satellite photo with her pointer light. "Miami is

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forecasting hurricane strength by six tonight, and I agree," she said, indicating the spiral form of the storm that now showed clearly. "There's a low trough of wet air lying flaccid just off the coast between Hatteras and Montauk. It then runs northeast near Nantucket and it's going to suck Claude inshore. Miami isn't quite ready to predict that, but I think it's likely. I think we should proceed on the basis of that assumed storm track."

"Rate of advance?" asked Cora Alexander in an expressionless tone.

Bettina gave a thoughtful shake of her head. "At least 20 knots by the time it's beyond Hatteras — I mean past latitude 35° — but I don't like the look of the whole map. The depression up over Long Island is deep and narrow. Things look a whole lot like the '38 storm. Claude might work up to 50 or 60, but I just don't know how to forecast that kind of acceleration from what we have now."

The Techoceanics attorney, Arthur Goodspeed, raised a finger. "Then you predict the storm will come ashore on this coast, Dr. Holbrook?"

The meteorologist nodded. "Somewhere it will hit land, Arthur; perhaps Long Island, perhaps Cape Cod."

The lawyer turned to Cora Alexander. "Cora, I thought we agreed not to attempt this if the hurricane was certain to do damage ashore?"

Ray answered him bluntly. "Don't be stupid, Arthur! We're busted, broke, out of cash! This may be the last storm this year."

One of the Hartford men cleared his throat and spoke in a low, well-modulated tone. "My instructions are to urge you to attempt to modify the storm. My principals are not willing to continue this sort of funding level for a full additional year. But if you should destroy or divert the storm, you will have repaid our underwriter's group handsomely. Obviously, further funding in that case would be an easy matter."

The man from the Boston bank shook his head ruefully at his lawyer friend. "I understand your problems, Arthur," he said, "but we also hope to see the method tried now."

"After all, Arthur," said Cora Alexander in a dry, cold voice, "if we get sued for making the storm worse, instead of breaking it apart, they'll just be going after a bankrupt wreck with no assets or prospects. Also, there's no physical reason why we should make it worse. The worst we can do is to do nothing at all."

"Well, let's hope so," said the old lawyer, shrugging in doubt.

"Can we vote on this?" said Cora suddenly. "All in favor of attempting modification of tropical storm Claude, raise your hands." They all put up their hands except the lawyer, and Cora stared at him. "Are you abstaining or voting no, Arthur?" she said icily, but he suddenly put his hand up.

"Try it," he said in a cracked, excited voice. "Try it, Cora. To hell

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with the lawsuits!"

Sept. 7, 1700 — 2400

In doubling its length and width, the storm Claude increased its energy uptake from the Gulf Stream by a factor of four. This added impetus for growth and activity was manifested in two ways, in addition to the further linear expansion of the storm's perimeter, mostly north and west. Claude's rotary energy increased so that in its 1800 advisory, Miami declared Claude a hurricane. The weather buoys dropped by a late-afternoon overflight were showing gusts near the center to seventy knots. But Claude could also expend its overabundance of energy in another way, by moving its entire system north at increasing velocity.

So the ocean energy resource was tapped too rapidly for the storm to eat it by simply spreading. In addition, it spun ever more fiercely and moved ever more rapidly.

Coming across Claude's big, ragged funnel just at dusk, the Miami hunter pilot saw that Claude had grown from a childish, petulant disorder towards a fearsome, mature beauty. From over 30,000 feet up, he could look down into the sloping, roughly circular maw, indistinct with the sun setting, and see the stark white funnel of cloud that led down and down out of sight into a well of gathering violence. Claude was maturing, gaining in self-integration, forcing its way further and higher to involve ever-larger air masses. And everywhere it moved and spread, it ate moisture and thermal energy with a frenzied voracity.

Yet, in Indianapolis and Pittsburgh, people shivered under thin blankets and pulled summer jackets tighter around themselves. A gigantic thick finger of Arctic high had poked down from Canada over the middle eastern states. Though Claude was mighty, and would become mightier still, it had neither the resources of energy nor momentum to seriously challenge this vast, stolid mass of dense and quiet air.

To the east another, far smaller and weaker, high-pressure ridge of cold air stretched south, tentatively poking its weak leading edge towards Bermuda. Claude might have challenged this air mass, and probably broken through to the northeast, but the modest Greenland high had its control over Claude, not through sheer strength but by a more subtle yet more certain influence, the steering currents of thin air above 30,000 feet. The Greenland air mass had diverted these ordinarily easterly-flowing winds to the north, and huge, powerful Claude followed with the blind obedience of sheep after a Judas goat. Claude, driven by inexorable need to spend its energy, yet in so doing obtaining ever more, began to stride north into a deep valley of low barometer pointing at the New England coast.

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The late-evening New Bedford weather felt damp and heavy. Though the storm still lay over a thousand miles south, there was an oppressive sense of tropic air and the greasy, sheet-metal sidings of the barge cabins dripped and ran rivulets of water. In the center of Techoceanics' biggest barge sat a huge SeaCrane twin-rotor freight helicopter, but instead of the usual modular pods, this machine had been modified to sling an entire, whale-shaped boat, fat and double-ended, with two big screws showing under the stern. The boat stretched fifty feet under the rotary-wing freighter and seemed to be constructed entirely of welded aluminum sheets.

The air was dead still and the barge was brightly lit by many searchlights and TV light-columns. Four persons stood in front of the thirty-odd press people: Ray Alexander and his tall wife in padded jumpsuits, and two other short, squatty men in bulky flying clothes. Around behind these four clustered some of the Techoceanics engineers and financial people in business suits.

Cora Alexander held up her hand for quiet and shouted, "I'm going to make a statement and give you the tech briefing. Okay, here's the way the system is supposed to work. I've sketched the storm in a vertical cross-section on this blackboard. Now what we found some years back is that the top of the storm, about 25,000 feet in the case of Claude, has a very high negative potential — tens, hundreds of thousands of volts — with a similiar high postive at the base." She indicated the two locations on the diagram. "Now in a thunderhead or line squall, or similiar type of nonrotating storm with high atmospheric electrical potentials, the electron excess in a cloud is mainly produced by the movement of rain and hail. The water particles carry charges around in the cloud, or between clouds and the earth. This electrical phenomenon in revolving or hurricane types of storms is based on a different principle. It's produced by the motion in the earth's magnetic field. If you remember your electrical physics, you know that if you revolve or move charges through a magnetic field, you develop potential."

"So the storm is acting like a huge generator, Dr. Alexander?" asked a reporter up at the front.

"Correct," said Cora, showing a mouth full of large, startling teeth, "but a generator with an open circuit. There's all that voltage potential, but no external wire. We're going to provide the wire. We're going to short-circuit the storm by creating an electrically conducting path between its foot and its top. Our computer-simulations suggest convincingly that the core of the mature hurricane will not be able to sustain its order and identity when this energy drain begins. The storm will fragment from the eye outwards, break into a series of small storms which will eat energy from each other.

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Most important, we hope to break the grip of the stratospheric winds, the steering currents, on Claude's upper levels, to cut the storm loose so it takes its natural northeasterly direction that the Coriolis force would dictate. That is, *away from this coast.*"

Several of the reporters stared at each other in scorn and disbelief. The man who had spoken before said, "You claim you can string a wire up through the eye of a hurricane?"

Cora patted her tight bun of gray hair and gave a sudden he-haw sort of laugh. "Not even my husband would try something that dumb," she said gruffly, hooking a thumb at frowning Ray. "We're going to create an ionized column of air for the current to follow. The material of the core itself, air and water vapor, will be our wire, but we have to get things started."

She turned to point at the huge, silent helicopter and its oddly shaped load. "That boat, the *Nikola Tesla*, will be the lower terminal in the atmospheric circuit. It has two very powerful diesel engines and these have two uses: first, to drive propellers to let us move around at Claude's center, and second, to drive a generator and power a large induction coil inside the boat. Once the *Tesla* arrives at the proper location at the center of the storm, we will extend a high mastlike structure above the *Tesla* with a large openwork electrode, and the high voltage will be maintained between the top of the mast and the aluminum hull of the boat. This will create a high-density cloud of ions around the *Tesla*. At the top of the storm, our aircraft will be doing essentially the same thing. That is, it will maintain a potential between its own metal skin and a large electrode towed some distance below it. In this way, we will create two large ion pools, of proper sign, at the top and bottom of the storm, and our calculations indicate that a self-sustaining current flow will be set up over the five-mile vertical air column."

"But the boat and the plane must remain there if the electron flow is to be maintained?" said a man at the back.

Cora gave a single nod. "We think we must maintain the ion generation for a few minutes. Our computer models suggest that as the eye rotation falters, and the structure begins to collapse, there will be leakage and short-circuiting all along the vortex face. At that point, the storm will not need us any longer. It will destroy itself, blow out its own heart."

A young woman who had worked her way forward along the edge of the barge now held up her hand. "Dr. Alexander, isn't it correct that three ecological groups have gone to Judge Goldfarb of the Federal District Court in Boston to gain an order to stop this experiment? I wonder if you'd care to comment on that?"

Cora Alexander gave the cameras a fearsomely witchlike frown, her wide mouth turning down in disgust. "Our

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attorney, Mr. Goodspeed, and our friends from the insurance underwriters group were forced to fly back to Boston to meet with Judge Goldfarb because of that. In my opinion, this action is a damnable outrage!"

"Then," said the reporter, "the ecologists' claims that you may create several dangerous storms out of one have no merit? Is that your position?"

Dr. Alexander stared at the young woman with an undisguised mixture of pity and contempt. "The storm, my dear, gains its energy primarily from the ocean's surface. Its power and its danger derive from its singleness, its integrated nature. Once we take that same energy total, and break it into a dozen, or a hundred smaller parts, we draw the thing's teeth."

The woman pressed forward and persisted. "But that's just more theory. What if it's wrong? Haven't we meddled enough with nature? How do you know what essential part hurricanes may play in the ecology?"

Cora's yellow fangs snapped terrifyingly together. "Did you major in home-ec., dearest?" she said with a sarcasm so fierce that even Ray grinned at her. "And does your uncle own the paper where you work? What in hell do you think hurricanes do for the ecology? I'll tell you what they do. They decimated the terns south of Cape Cod. The wild oysters went and never came back. Scallop and cohaug beds that had lasted since Indian times, hundreds of years, were blown away. The salt marshes were wrecked, the Great Ponds infiltrated, the aquifers turned brackish. The ducks were gone, the shellfish small and thin, everything ruined, destruction and death, not to mention a billion dollars in human property losses plus some dozens of human lives gone if sweetie-pie Claude comes ashore on Long Island or Rhode Island at the wrong time of the tide. And those damned fools are up with a damned federal judge to tell us we can't try and stop that bloody mayhem! Go to hell, you dumb, bleeding-hearted broad! I've got my men in that SeaCrane office right now, and if that fat-assed judge tries to..."

But Bobby Winthrop, thirty-one-year-old project manager of the hurricane modification attempt at Techoceanics, saw how badly it was going and stepped quickly forward to seize his president by her elbow with a sharp squeeze of warning and to send off to the young, flinty-eyed environmental reporter a warm and apologetic smile. Bobby would soon vector them into the storm center, then decide on the proper moment for the ion fields to be energized. It was his combination of even-tempered urbanity with a careful use of understatement that had mainly kept Techoceanics afloat in troubled seas for four years. Bobby wore a conservative three-piece suit, dark blue with pinstripes, and since he was as tall as Cora, and broad-shouldered as well, he lent a sudden air of corporate stabil-

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ity to the ranting, ugly old woman in her outer-space-look jumpsuit.

"I remind you, ladies and gentlemen," said Bobby, and his voice became progressively warmer and more engaged in the matter, "that Ray and Cora Alexander will be risking their lives in our attempt to destroy the storm. Risking their lives to save others. I hope you'll forgive Dr. Alexander's excited and inaccurate comments. I think we'd all be happier if we could simply go ahead with the job instead of having to justify ourselves at the last moment to a federal judge who knows nothing of the matter."

The young woman was not placated and she dearly wanted to get at Cora again. "Look," she persisted, "Dr. Alexander implied that she would fly off this barge at once if she learned of a federal restraint order. Do you deny you meant that?" she said, pointing fiercely at Cora.

"We deny it absolutely," said Bobby Winthrop in a smooth, breathy voice. "However, our simulations and weather predictions suggest that we must be airborne with the *Tesla* within the hour. Since issuing such a restraint order on the basis of emotional and scientifically implausible speculations would effectively end the experiment, and also this corporation, we feel certain that Judge Goldfarb will not make such a precipitous and economically disastrous decision."

"Oh, save that stupid crap for the Hebe judge," said Ray Alexander in a soft, disgusted snarl, but not quite softly enough.

"Did you have a comment, Mr. Alexander?" said the young woman in an alert, hard voice.

While Cora whispered fiercely at her husband and shot him an enraged glance of warning, Bobby Winthrop stepped toward the reporters, so that they would not get any closer to Ray and Cora. "All right," he said, and his voice was full and hearty, "we're engineers. If we can break this storm at sea, people, perhaps plenty of people, will be alive tomorrow instead of dead. If you had a beach house at Montauk, or a fishing vessel in Mystic Harbor, I wonder whom you'd rather have looking out for your life and property: the judges and lawyers, of which this country has more than anyplace else in the known universe, or Ray and Cora," and he tossed his head backwards to indicate the Alexanders. "Words are great, my friends, but when Claude comes ashore like a million express trains over the shelf, those sixty-foot breakers won't recognize any restraint orders."

A tall, older man in the center of the group waved a notebook and several others turned respectfully toward him, for this was the science editor of the *Times* itself, the dean of American science writers. "I agree, Mr. Winthrop, let's drop the legal monkeyshines," he said cheerfully. "Can I ask the Alexanders about the terminal phase of this? Specifically, will the

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boat and aircraft be able to maintain the field and then escape? What about conditions at the eye when the storm disintegrates?

Bobby half-turned and said in a hopeful, almost plaintive voice, "Cora?"

Cora Alexander nodded brusquely at the reporter. "The simulations we've run on the collapse phase are very sensitive to the assumed initiating conditions. The *Tesla*, as you can see, is sealed and can be inverted without injury or danger. If the storm bifurcates at a low altitude, well, there may be a problem with the aircraft."

"By problem," said the *Times* man at once, "Do you mean the plane might be torn apart in the upward-moving turbulence?"

"That can't be ruled out," said Cora at once.

"Mr. Alexander," said the reporter, "Techoceanics lost a plane and two men in a big thunderhead two years ago. Do you have any comments on that accident as it relates to this project?"

Before Bobby Winthrop could intervene, Ray had lifted his head and pointed an angry finger directly at the reporter. "We were forced into that idiotic stunt by our financial people. The goddamned upper cloud had a reversed polarity. When the induction machine ran into that electron excess, the stroke blew off a wing. We lost the finest geophysical pilot, the best and smartest man we ever had in this whole freak show...."

"That was an entirely different experiment," said Bobby hastily, "an attempt to electrically seed a thunderhead, you know, make rain...."

But the man from the *Times* had pivoted and was now peering at the two short, portly, middle-aged men in bulky flying suits standing close together, but somewhat apart from the rest of the group. "Captain Stein, what are your ideas regarding Dr. Alexander's doubts about your aircraft?"

Milton Stein was a pudgy, forty-year-old avowed homosexual. He was Techoceanics' pilot and was usually cheerful and quiet, becoming more and more cheerful as a situation grew tighter. Now, the wet and humid dark pressing around him, the hostility of the reporters only thinly held back, the mission about to start, his flat, open face seemed almost a mask of bland cheerfulness.

"*Gay Enola* is a strong airplane," he said in a clear voice. "Smitty and I have stiffened her up, and those old Grummans were made tough." He turned and patted the shoulder of his long-time friend and associate, Bertram Smith, another short, pudgy man with another cheerful moonface. Stein and Smith had roomed together during graduate school, received doctorates in atmospheric physics, and together had started a geophysical contracting service. When Techoceanics had lost their chief pilot two years before, the two men agreed to join the hurricane modification project as full-time consult-

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ants. The young engineers around the shop called them Tweedledum and Tweedledee, but with respect and affection.

The *Times* man blinked at Stein. "*Gay Enola?* That's the name of your aircraft?"

Ray Alexander gave a snort of disgust, but it was partly covered by his wife's response, a warning snarl. The short pilot beamed at the press. "We're trying to do the opposite of what *Enola Gay* did, so Smitty thought it would be nice to reverse the name."

Bobby Winthrop gave a hearty but slightly nervous laugh. "What Captain Stein means, ha ha, is that our big bang will save lives, not end them."

The tall reporter gave a bemused shrug. "And don't you feel the name implies anything more?" he said almost slyly.

The pilot retained his benign expression, but he turned to directly face the *Times* man. "You imply, but we fly," Stein emphasized with a nod, "and so we will name it what we choose." Bertram Smith gave a chuckle and smiled shyly at his friend.

"Those weirdos'll fly without the Grumman," muttered Ray in a sour whisper, but this time too quietly for even his wife to catch it.

The *Times* man spoke once more. "Forget the name, Captain, what about the risk? What if *Gay Enola* isn't strong enough?"

"We people built close to the ground are hard to kill," said the pilot with a smile. "And our bonus, if we succeed, will buy a fleet of *Gay Enolas*. The world, I mean the remote-sensing geophysical world, will be ours."

Bobby Winthrop saw with relief that this was creating a sympathetic impression with the reporters, but then his stomach tightened as he felt Bettina Holbrook's hand suddenly grip his elbow. "Arthur called," she whispered close to his ear. "Judge Goldfarb is still taking arguments from the underwriters' lawyer, but Arthur thinks he's going to issue the restraint order. He put Arthur and the Hartford people under oath not to call us until the presentations were over."

Bobby blinked several times and reached at once into his inner, left-breast pocket. His hand moved swiftly from the pill bottle to his mouth. "Arthur broke his oath to the judge and they haven't even restrained us yet?" he whispered back. "Okay, you know the drill, Bettina sweetie. Get the Gold Dust Twins " — he made the smallest motion toward the pilot and his aircrew — "over to the airport when the SeaCrane lifts off."

Bettina put her arm around Bobby's waist and hugged. "Promise me, when this is done, we'll walk away for a while. Promise, Bobby! Why should your gut hurt all the time because these crazies haven't got the self-discipline of a disturbed rattlesnake? Why, dammit?"

"We're in too deep. My God, Bettina, you know how bloody gigantic

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this thing is! Bettina, it's a whole hurricane! And we're going to rip out its gut from the *inside*, baby!"

Bobby Winthrop affectionately patted Bettina in a familiar place, then stepped sturdily forward again. "Dr. Holbrook, our project meteorologist, just notified me that Claude has accelerated and our rendezvous time has moved ahead." He strode through the reporters half-shouting these words and, as he strode, he pointed his two arms straight upward from each, and began to whirl them in rapid, tight circles. Instantly, the four big jet engines of the SeaCrane began to puff and rumble. With its two broad rotor-blade assemblies sagged limp and lifeless down around the flat machine and its fatter load, the idea of flight seemed ludicrous, but now the blades began to move. As they stiffened up and out, forming two great, hissing circles of air, the SeaCrane took on a far more businesslike aspect.

Bobby beckoned for Ray, then gave him a good-natured slap on the shoulder and wished him well. He seized Cora and to her astonishment, put his lips to her cheek. "They think the judge is going against us," he whispered. "Tell the pilot to stay offshore and as low as he can. Come around Montauk and scoot in from the south. Good luck, Cora."

She gave him a huge and fearful grin and scuttled after her small husband, under the safety ropes and into the small, open hull port on the otherwise smooth side of the *Tesla*. The door shut flush into the side of the boat, and Bobby now had his thumbs both vertical and he was throwing his fists upward, over and over again.

The SeaCrane whined and roared in answer and the chatter of the blades increased in both loudness and frequency. Flashbulbs popped, the cameras panned upward, and the SeaCrane lifted straight up, accelerating as it went, and was lost from sight in a moment, even its flashing navigation lights winking out at once behind the heavy mist. Bobby was pleased to note that *Gay Enola*'s crew, plus Bettina, was also gone. The noise of the SeaCrane was so great, he hadn't even heard her start her car.

"Thank you for coming," called out Bobby, waving his hands in a bye-bye gesture to the reporters. "Good night, wish us luck." He turned and walked into the after deckhouse and shut the door, then sat down at his messy desk in a straight chair and swallowed spit for a while. But he didn't quite throw up this time, and soon the nausea faded away and he swallowed some more pills and shakily wiped his forehead with a large, monogrammed handkerchief.

As he sat, blinking and cold, waiting for Bettina to come back, the door opened and the young woman who had asked the environmental questions stepped in. Bobby stared at her from half-shut eyes. "Sorry," he said, "the press conference is over."

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"Not quite," said the woman. "You people didn't finish the briefing. For example, the SeaCrane can't possibly reach that storm from here and return to land, so it has to be refueling someplace. Where? Long Island? New Jersey? And where did those pilots go? There isn't any Grumman Goose aircraft at the New Bedford airport. Are they working off the water, out of a cove someplace?"

She looked around. "And you're going to vector the thing, but where? Where are the antennas and the satellite dish and all that stuff — on any of Techoceanics' properties around New Bedford?"

She took several steps towards him. "The fact is, you people knew there were going to be court and legal problems, and you planned for them. Your whole team is just going to disappear, and no federal marshal will know where in the hell you're at, until after you try your dangerous little trick!"

Bobby took some deep breaths, then managed a cold smile. "Tomorrow or the next day, dear, you're going to feel like the biggest damn fool in the whole world, because those two mad, infuriating geniuses in that nutty boat, and those two gentle queens — who incidentally have ten times the guts of any of you standing on our filthy barge in your double-knit suits — and a few other not-especially-nice people here and there, are going to blast Claude's guts into little pieces and save the world. You got onto an interesting story, dear, but you got it from the wrong end. You grabbed the wrong handle."

The woman took another step, and angrily lifted her finger to point at Bobby, but behind her came a sharp "Hold it!" The woman turned to see Bettina in the door behind her, hands on her hips, her face a mask of resolve. "Get off this property," she said icily. "The press conference is over!" and when the woman hesitated, she called, "Mike?" and a large and greasy workman appeared instantly at her elbow.

"I'm going," said the reporter stiffly, picking her way across the littered barge deck, "but not far. The bridge and the road aren't owned by Techoceanics!"

As soon as she climbed the ladder up to the roadway, Bobby got slowly to his feet and lifted a slicker off a hook. He grinned tiredly at Bettina, and they walked rapidly across the barge deck to climb down into the big Whaler resting at the bottom of the ladder. Mike grinned down at them. "Ya bust that storm, ya hear! Blast her ta pieces!"

He threw down their lines, and Bettina backed the boat out of its narrow space, the ninety-horse engine barely grumbling. Neither of them bothered to look back at the bridge, where the reporter stood peering after them, for within a hundred yards they had disappeared into the heavy mist, and the engine sound faded soon after.

Bobby pulled on his slicker and

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looked over at Bettina. "I love you," he said tenderly. "I'm going to be better ... we're going to be better, after this is over."

Bettina smiled and nodded at him. "If it works, everything will be better. Poor Arthur, what will he say when the judge asks where we've gone?"

Bobby shrugged. "The truth, I suppose. He really doesn't know where any of our refueling or rendezvous points are, or where the project management will locate."

Bettina shook her head. "They won't believe it. Dear old Arthur, in jail at last — and at his age, too."

Bobby sighed, then gently patted Bettina's slightly rounded slacks. "I'm going to be better, sweetie. Afterward. After it's done. I promise."

Sept. 8, midnight — 0300

Hurricane Claude reached its full maturity in the early morning of its fourth day of life. It now occupied many thousands of square miles of ocean, had extended its circulation pattern to over 30,000 feet, and had begun to move north at a steady 12 knots. Yet the Gulf Stream had swung close to land that fall and so the fuel that drove Claude's vast engine was plentiful as the storm neared the latitude of Hatteras. Ashore, along the barrier beaches, there was dark wet weather, gusts and freshets of warm tropic rain, and fitful swirls of heavy fog, but the dangerous eastern semicircle still lay 200 miles offshore.

But as Bettina Holbrook and the other meteorologists in Miami and Hartford and Boston had all feared, the storm was starting to hook west and run like a bowling ball right up the New Jersey gutter of low barometer. With the midnight advisory, Miami hoisted hurricanes warnings as far north as Long Island, and hurricane watches north and east of that. Claude's energy flow was continuously out of balance, and that lack of equilibrium drove the great cyclonic winds around Claude's center at ever-greater rates.

At a little after midnight, the Panamanian container ship *Commercial Queen*, struggling east and south to escape the dangerous eastern side of the storm, was caught by Claude's rapid acceleration and broken in two by a wave, described by crewmembers later as over 100 feet high. Most of the men stayed with the stern of the vessel and were saved by Coast Guard aircraft two days later, but five men on the bow section were blown out of sight to the west and never seen again. The western fringe of Claude had already disabled several yachts, but this was its first major kill. As it hooked toward the distant Long Island shore, boatmen from Washington, D.C. to Calais, Maine, began to think about their anchors and their tackle. And suddenly, everybody wondered about the tide and when and where the storm might

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come ashore. The old men who had seen the harbors after the '38 storm just shook their heads. If it came again like that, they said, you just run for high ground. Forget the boats and houses.

Bettina skillfully brought the Whaler alongside the *Michael Faraday*, Techoceanics' forty-foot workboat, where it lay off the Fairhaven docks hidden in the mist, waiting for them. Bobby was feeling a bit more pep and he jumped over the side with the Whaler's painter and then helped Bettina climb up.

"Go, man," he said to Walter Nunes, the young communications engineer running the *Faraday*. "Let's get out of this harbor before they shut that crazy barrier."

"They're aiming for 10 A.M. or noon for that," said the young man at once. "They called us, the Corps of Engineers I mean, and asked for Bettina. When we said she was at a press conference, they asked if she could give them a call and her thoughts later, as they put it."

"Screw that," said Bobby briskly. "Listen, they'll see the boat going through the hurricane barrier, but there's no point in their seeing me or Bettina. Where's Mr. Equal Opportunity?"

"Sacked out below," said a grinning Nunes. "He's going to take her the last half of the run."

Bobby motioned for Bettina and they went down into the dark forward cabin. On one of the bunks, snoring strongly, was a large, rather scruffy young black man. His stained T-shirt had a mushroom cloud motif set next to a circular hurricane cloud, the two united by a lightning bolt. Above and underneath was printed a still-deathless quote from Ray Alexander at a still-regretted Techoceanics environmental debate one year earlier: "Nuke 'em, Shock 'em, who cares? I hate hurricanes!"

Bobby sat down next to Bettina on the other bunk and sighed, staring at this emblem of stupidity and needless defiance. "If we do it, Bettina," he said, as though trying to convince himself, "it will all be worth it."

"Don't despair, dear Bobby," she said softly, now hugging him to her. "You got us this far. But, oh, what if those two sweet little men...?" She did not finish, but hugged him silently and tightly. The *Michael Faraday* chugged along through the narrow gap of the New Bedford hurricane barrier, and the man in charge saw only one of the bearded Techoceanics engineers waving cheerily up at him. Well, they came and they went, he thought, and turned to talk to a reporter from CableNews about exactly when the barrier gate might be shut that next day.

The conspiracy to burst Claude's mighty heart had three final points of focus. On the south shore of Long Island, just west of Moriches Inlet, a major stockholder in Techoceanics and thus a much-interested bystander, had made a protected inlet and beach area

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available, plus his summer home. In the tiny shallow harbor sat a small fuel boat, filled chockablock with JP-2, ready to replenish the SeaCrane with its needed fuel for its final dash offshore to meet Claude and dump the *Nicola Tesla.*

On a tiny grass airport in central New Jersey, the old but sturdy Grumman Goose known as *Gay Enola* hid demurely under canvas coverings in a quiet corner of the field. When the sun set that day, the wraps came off, and now the local crew tensely awaited the arrival of the small executive plane Stein and Smith had used to leave the New Bedford Airport after midnight, leased under the name of one of their earlier, and now defunct, companies. Somehow, the flight plan had listed Albany Municipal Airport as destination instead of the Jersey strip.

To bring these giant-killers to the right point in time and proper location in space required a third and very complicated participant. Fortunately, a director of Techoceanics happened to be a trustee administering the almost deserted island of Wasque located south and west of Cape Cod. He had arranged for Geodata, a wholly owned but independent part of Techoceanics, to establish a satellite-communications testing lab at the low center of the island. In the small building there was the weather-access and communications gear that brought in all the ordinary channels, but most important, two big white, slow shifting dishes on top that gave this remote place direct and interference-free communications access to both *Gay Enola* and the *Nicola Tesla.*

Techoceanics had leased two channels for open use, and they were now locked on a high, Bell System transpolar satellite that would be up over them for several days, until long after the matter of Claude would be decided, one way or the other.

The early-morning fog thickened as they ran south and east of New Bedford. Bobby tried to sleep, with Bettina's arms around him, but a sudden foghorn hoot woke him up with a start and a shudder and they went back up to the wheelhouse. Walter Nunes lay on a cabin bench on his back, seemingly fast asleep, his beard pointing stiffly upward. Moke Mogamo, the black youth with the inflammatory T-shirt, now urged the *Faraday* at a quiet pace through the murk, the big engines only muttering. Every now and then he pushed the hooter button.

"Jesus, Moke," said Bobby Winthrop, "where in hell are we?"

Moke peered out with every appearance of confidence. "About a quarter-mile northwest of the entrance buoy," he said with a careless wave of his hand.

"Why can't we hear the bell, then?" said Bobby, and he felt that familiar fist begin to close inside his gut again.

Moke gave him a relaxed grin. "Not enough swell to rock the big

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mother, Bobby. Damn thing is sitting there trying to fart out a big bonger and it can't even poop out a little ping."

"Think we could hire some ghetto folks to come and bong those bongers and poop those pings, Moke?" said Nunes without opening his eyes. "On the calm days, I mean."

"You been bongin' your bonger too much, old buddy. That's your whole problem. You gotta get your old lady away from that meditation stuff," said Moke in a cheerful and practical voice. "I got in three suggestions to the Screening Committee for ways to bong that buoy bell in a dead calm." He shrugged at Bobby. "Well, they said all the time at Harvard Business School you got to diversify, get into new, publicly visible projects. I don't mean busting hurricanes isn't visible, but you need homier stuff, too."

"Boy," said Nunes in a yawning voice, "nasty old Ray sure said it for once. There's nothing worse than a smart nigger. It isn't so much he stuffs the Haaavaaad B. School in your ear night and day, but then he's got all these public-spirited ideas about bongin' the bongers. Makes a man feel small."

But Moke was lost in thought. "It's really something to imagine that wonderful little ship is going to be driven to death or fame by the spiritual head of the Ku Klux Klans of the World. I mean Ray hates *everybody*. Nobody is discriminated against."

"Including Ray," said Bettina sourly.

Moke shook his head. "If he can do that, Bettina, drive that chariot to glory out there where old Claude's balls are hanging wild and loose, shit, the rest doesn't matter, right? I mean old Ray can crap on me for the rest of his mean old life and I'll still kiss the fucker's feet!"

"Where's that damn bell?" said Bobby, his whole body tensed, leaning forward.

Moke blinked and focused his thoughts. He turned his head slightly one way, then the other, and let his eyelids droop. "There," he said, "it oofed out a ding." He paused, then pointed. "Again!" he said.

"I hear it," said Bobby, blinking at Bettina and suddenly sitting down on the bench opposite Nunes.

"Our bow wave set the mother rocking," said Moke with an even more elaborate casualness. Like many shoal pilots, he had learned that the slower you went, the more confidence you showed. "There she is," he said, peering and pointing to starboard. "Fog's not so bad close to the island."

But Bobby once again crouched in the corner and tried to conceal his intense efforts at swallowing. He had easily imagined them lost, running circles or on a bar aground as the storm came north over them. Only Bettina noticed, and she sat next to him, stroking his forehead and whispering encouragement. They seemed like a unlikely bunch, to be challenging a giant like Claude.

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Moke brought the *Faraday* alongside the main dock in the small protected harbor of Wasque, and they were assisted in tying up by Professor Wilson Worth, a retired expert in electrical engineering and friend of the trustees of Wasque Island. He served Techoceanics as an unpaid consultant and caretaker on the remote Wasque, and, like the others, awaited the attempt to dismember Claude with complete anticipation.

Professor Worth was a tall and vigorous old man with a bushy white moustache. "Moke and Walt," he shouted down, "better get the *Faraday* on that one-ton storm mooring, the black one to the left, and be sure to put chafing gear on those lines. You can huff the Whaler up the rollers with the sixfold tackle. Run her way up, I think."

Moke shook his head sadly at Professor Worth. "Doc, that storm's not coming ashore. Ray and Cora are too mean to let it come in. Man, you gotta have faith."

Worth grinned and shrugged. "True, and I've got faith, but there may still be, uh, a slight elevation in water level." He helped Bettina, then Bobby, climb onto the wharf and threw the lines back on the *Faraday* as Moke backed her out and turned to make a circle out to the mooring.

"C'mon," said Worth to Bettina and Bobby, "I'll run you guys to the shack while they do their stuff with the boats." They climbed into an open jeep and began a brief, slow, bumpy trip over an old sheeping meadow down to the bowl of a tiny hidden pond where the small concrete-block communications building squatted at its edge. Two big white dish antennas sat pointing at the same section of sky, and a thin 200-foot guyed mast poked high over Wasque, another microwave dish at its top.

"Anything come in?" said Bobby in a dispirited voice as they walked into the fluorescent-lighted space, filled along three walls with consoles and instrument racks.

Professor Worth lifted his thick eyebrows. "Nothing from Long Island or Jersey yet, but they won't be arriving for a little while. Miss Philips, Arthur's Girl Friday, sent us a message through the answering service. Judge Goldfarb issued the restraint, and when he found there were no corporate officers, or even a project manager, to serve, he ordered Arthur to tell him where everyone had gone. Arthur said he didn't know, and Goldfarb charged Arthur with contempt."

Bobby sighed tiredly. "Goldfarb and Arthur were classmates at Yale Law School," he said.

Bettina shook her head. "Yeh, but Goldfarb was president of the Jewish law fraternity and didn't even get on the Law Review Board until his last year, even though he was No. 1 in his class. Arthur was editor. Hateful Ray knows all those nasty kinds of things."

Professor Worth stroked his mous-

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tache and cleared his throat. "I'm afraid Judge Goldfarb is subjecting Arthur to torture," he said somberly.

"Come on, Willie," said Bobby in an even more tired voice. "In Boston, they're going to torture a seventy-year-old former president of the Bar Association?"

"Judge Goldfarb decided that Arthur should be held in custody, until he purges his contempt and tells where we are, but he didn't want to toss classmate Arthur in with the drug-pushers and hookers. So instead, he's had two cots set up in his chambers, and he and Arthur are going to live there until Goldfarb has convinced Arthur to obey the law and purge himself. He's going to talk to him, to lecture him, man to man, judge to attorney, Jew to Gentile."

"So it *is* torture," said Bettina, simultaneously grinning and squeezing out a tear. "Dear old Arthur," she said fondly, "Everybody is fighting so hard for us, Bobby. Oh, we must win! How's Claude doing, Willie?"

Professor Worth led them over to the weather consoles and the large visual display showing the eastern seaboard and the western North Atlantic region. 'Seems to be coming along nicely, Bettina. I ran your combined statistical projection and map-analysis program on it about a half hour ago and got that output there for First Touch."

Bettina peered down at the printer-drawn map, the concentric ovals of pressure gradient showing the eye with the first oval just meeting the Long Island shore about at Montauk Point at the eastern tip. "About eighteen hours to that point, huh?" She shook her head in thought. "Bobby, we'd better make a full vector projection right now. Ray and Cora won't have much time to hang around on that Long Island beach."

Bobby nodded, grimacing, then shucked his suit coat and dark silk vest. "Okay, let's do it. Willie, keep an eye on the com channels so we know when our wandering friends reach their destinations." He sat down heavily in front of the main computation racks and shook his head. "The closer we get to this, the more impossible it becomes," he said almost to himself. "But maybe that's for the best. If it doesn't work, *Gay Enola* might make it back out of the eye."

Professor Worth patted Bobby's shoulder and his voice was thoughtful. "I don't know as I wouldn't rather be in that Goose with Uncle Milt and Aunt Bertie flying me through the exploding eye of a hurricane, than in those chambers being lectured by Judge Goldfarb on law and order."

Sept. 8, 0300 — 0800

Hurricane Claude was now a gigantic, fully matured, rotating storm, extending over thousands of square miles and influencing the entire circu-

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lation over the North Atlantic Ocean west of the Azores. To the east, in its dangerous sector, the winds blew from the south and east with gusts of over 100 miles an hour. To the west of the storm center, where the mammoth Canadian high had dipped deeply into the continental heartland to challenge Claude for the American coast, thunderstorms and drenching rains ran along the ridge of increasing barometer, and buffeting northwest winds rattled windows as far west as Cleveland.

Yet when it came abreast of Hatteras, Claude's life-to-be was well established by the heavy, supine Canadian and Greenland cold-air masses. The long low-pressure trough, lying like a great snake up the Jersey coast to cross Long Island and bisect Cape Cod, drew Claude north and helped it to run. Low attracted low, and each system fed the other's needs.

Most of the predictions agreed that the three-quarter moon tide would be high one to three hours after Claude came ashore at Montauk, then struck Rhode Island and Cape Cod. Everywhere, boats were desperately lifted and hauled, moorings checked and worried over, plywood sheets nailed up over the big picture windows at Quogue and Matunuck, Menemsha and Madaket. And when people peered, in those summer towns and fishing villages, at the old marks painted after the '38 and '54 storms to show the water rise, then turned to look out at the close, foggy, sullen water, they knew that nothing would save the boats and houses, if it came like that again.

The huge bloated SeaCrane drifted in, hissing and roaring, from the south over the foggy Long Island shore. A transponder, set in the center of the small beach, brought the big machine down next to the fuel boat, itself barely floating in the tiny inlet. Cora had the hatch open and was unwinding out of it before the big blades drooped down to a lifeless sag. As she jogged towards the big angular modern house, embellished with its own white microwave dish pointing upward, she met the Techoceanics communications man-in-charge running to meet her.

"We've got Wasque on the beam and they give us two hours, twenty minutes to lift, Cora," he said in a tense voice.

"Where does that put the final moment, in relation to Long Island?" said Cora, turning in impatient annoyance to see Ray finally tumble out of the small hatch and sleepily begin a walk to the beach house. He had snoozed during the entire trip from New Bedford.

"You better talk to Bettina on that, Cora," said the young man as they stalked briskly through big double doors and into a book-lined study, now turned into a wire-laced and sophisticated communications link.

Cora put on a headset. "Who's there? Moke?"

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"Hi, Cora. They fueling the chopper? You got to move out soon, lady."

"Where's Bettina?"

"Here, Cora. Listen, we're sending the vector-final map-fax. Stand by," said Bettina, and the SatFax machine began to create a North American operations map, complete with the tracks of Claude, the SeaCrane-*Tesla* mission, and *Gay Enola*'s course to the final meeting at the eye of the storm, all with times and headings.

Cora and a still-sleepy Ray watched the map develop, and Cora shook her head. "But that puts breakup at less than 300 miles south of land, Bettina. And you've got us going into Claude head-on, or at least almost."

"Claude may be hitting over fifty knots up there, Cora. Do you want to miss the eye? If you try to enter from the northwest quadrant, you might be driven too far south. The oval-of-confusion-of-intercept has a bag to the south of the center with that kind of approach." Bettina spoke in an intent and professional tone.

Ray stared sleepily down at the map. "Better 300 miles than zero, stupid!" he said in a slurred, insulting voice, and Cora nodded without expression.

"Okay," she said, "that's our baseline plan. What's the ninety-five percent lower-limit on lift-off here? They said we should go in two hours and twenty minutes?"

"Be ready in the *Tesla* by one hour and thirty minutes from now," said Bettina. "Start your engines by two hours, if we haven't given you the go by then. You'll definitely lift on or before two hours and twenty minutes from now."

"Okay, and I'll be back to you again in one hour, if something hasn't come up before then. What about Arthur?"

"Cora, look," said Bettina, "I want to get back to the storm. Willie got the whole thing direct from Arthur's sec. Here he is...."

And as the story of Arthur's incarceration and inquisition flew out to near the moon and back again, Cora turned and snarled at Ray. "Get some water boiling for the damn lobsters, dummy! We've only got an hour and a half."

"Jesus, lobsters!" said Ray in disgust, speaking to the communications engineer. "We'll be setting up a 5 million-volt field in a pool of stinking lobster upchuck. Wait'll that boat takes a couple of 180-degree rolls. That lobster won't stay in her gut, sonny!"

But the young engineer had dealt with Ray before and he gave him a slap on the back. "Ray, forget the 5 million volts. You just piss on that storm and it'll crawl right back to the Caribbean. Come on. Let's go have a drink."

A short time later, in the thin dawn over a murky New Jersey landing field, the small plane from New Bedford came in to land and then taxied directly to where *Gay Enola* waited.

As he bounced over the grass, Stein

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saw his tall and rangy crew chief, Stew Johnson, waving them in from under *Gay Enola*'s right wing. The big man had on flight coveralls, and over his shoulder was a parachute pack, and they could see that his face was grim. "Smitty," said Milton Stein in a tight voice. "We got trouble! Is your stuff together?"

"Just my kit bag, dear," said Smith in a squeaky voice. "Everything else is on *Gay Enola*."

"Then let's get going," said Stein, cutting his engine and popping open the hatch over the side-by-side seats.

As they climbed quickly down over the wing, the big crew chief strode over. "The weather lady at Wasque called about ten minutes ago and said that the Boston judge sent marshals into the New Bedford offices to seize all of Techoceanics' records. She thinks this place will be compromised. She said we should get off the ground and go over the lake to wait. There's still about six hours until you go out, she said."

Stein looked over across the field to the tiny control tower and the small complex of hangers and parking lot. "Any marshals show up yet, Stew?"

"Not as far as we can tell.... Wait, isn't that a car coming up the access road, way over there, Milt?"

"Let's go!" said Stein. "You come to the lake with us, Stew."

"Oh dear, *two* cars!" said Bertram Smith in a small, dismayed voice. He turned and jumped up into *Gay Enola*'s open cabin door.

Stein and Johnson followed him and pressed rapidly forward between the large electrical machines in the main cabin area of the Goose, up to the pilot's office. "She's ready, Milt," said Stew Johnson, settling into the copilot's seat and hitting both engine starters. The two big radials began to swing their props and in an instant they were banging and grumbling.

"Get the door, Smitty," shouted the pilot over the engine noise. "Here we go!"

Gay Enola trundled out onto the main east-west strip and started her takeoff run. There was almost no wind, and the pilot shoved both throttles ahead to full-emergency power. *Gay Enola* had new, supercharged double-radials, to give her the altitude capability needed to reach the upper parts of storms, and she bounded ahead on her small wheels with an almost rabbitlike motion.

"They're coming after us!" said Johnson as the two cars swung rapidly through the small parking lot next to the control tower and dashed out onto a taxi strip. "They're trying to cut us off!"

"Techoceanics Goose, this is control tower. You are not cleared for takeoff. Repeat, you are not—"

Stew Johnson turned off the radio with a curse, closely watching the two approaching cars. "They're going to get ahead of us, Milt. They can go faster," he said in a low voice, and moments later the first car dashed onto

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the runway ahead and slewed in a skidding half-circle as the driver slammed on his brakes.

Bertram Smith, who stood behind them at the rear of the pilot's cabin, sighed and shook his head. "Oh my," he said, "eight hours still to go and we're already in a game chicken with some nasty police. It really is one thing after another, isn't it, Miltie?"

Milton Stein made no comment. His expression was completely, blandly cheerful and he seemed to be hardly watching as the second car swerved to a stop beside the first one, while four men rapidly jumped out waving their arms. They soon stopped this as they realized that the big amphibian was getting both larger and noisier at a rapid rate. As one, they all fell down flat on the ground in front of their cars, and at that moment Stein pulled the wheel sharply back and *Gay Enola* gave a big hop, passing over the cars at an altitude of about ten feet. The amphibian staggered and sagged a bit lower, but did not touch the runway again, and they felt the ground effect cushion her until full flying speed was achieved and they began to climb steadily.

Stew Johnson let out a great gasp of breath and wiped his forehead. "You did it again, Milt. At least the bastards didn't shoot at us."

"Isn't he wonderful!" said Bertram Smith, who leaned to kiss the pilot warmly on his right cheek. "Everything is just so *exciting* with Milton!"

Stew Johnson shook his head and gave them both a huge grin. "Boy, you guys are really something else! By God, I wish I could go all the way in with you!"

Stein turned to smile at the crew chief. "So do we, Stew, but we might not get back with an extra man aboard to worry about."

The crew chief nodded, staring at his boots. "I know that. Still, I'd sure like to see you do it."

Gay Enola flew south and west for twenty more minutes, then came down to land on a small and private lake on a large and private estate in northeastern Pennsylvania. Sitting on a pier, his expression bored and pouting, a thin twelve-year-old boy was idly throwing stones at some ducks, which eventually flew off, quacking angrily. He turned in surprise as the big amphibian settled onto the water and rapidly taxied over to the float. His sneering, spoiled expression faded as he noticed the name of the plane, then its logo of a hurricane vortex pierced by a lightning bolt. The hull gently bumped the float as the engines died away, and Stew Johnson jumped out of the door onto the dock and grabbed a rope.

"Your dad around, son?" asked the crew chief, but then, hearing a distant shout, he looked up to see a short, fat, bald man walking rapidly down to the lake from a sprawling house. "Ah, here he comes," said Johnson.

The boy's eyes had grown large and round. As the pilot and Bertram Smith

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stepped out of *Gay Enola* onto the dock, he blinked. "Are you guys the hurricane busters?" he said in a high, astonished voice. "What are you doing *here?*"

Milton Stein pointed at the big house. "Smitty and I are going to sack out until the mission, but Stew can show you around the aircraft." He indicated the crew chief, then stepped across the dock to shake hands with a small, excited fat man who had hurried up, puffing and sweating in the tropical-feeling, damp morning. "How are you, Mr. Heartshorn? Nice to see you again."

"It's certainly a relief to see you people," said the overweight little banker. "One of your gang called up to tell us you were on the way."

"Any of them get caught?" said Stein, beaming cheerfully at the fat, agitated man.

Heartshorn shook his head angrily, his jowls vibrating. "Your bunch left in a van while those cuckoos were playing car games on the runway with you. By God, I'm going to see those federal bastards in jail when this is over, believe me." The banker shook his head. "The trouble is, with the Techoceanics management and PR staff essentially out of the picture, our adversaries are having a field day in the press. They're beginning to sound as though we really were going to use a hydrogen bomb on the damn storm! And that loud, public flap drives the federal cops into playing James Bond. Well, they got their tit in the wringer this time, Captain, believe me!"

The small boy stared, his mouth an O, at his fat, ugly little father. "Hey, Dad, wow! Are you in this, *too?*" His usually scowling or sneering expression was replaced by a combination of hero worship and complete astonishment.

The banker stared at his son, and his small, angry eyes became softer and his expression was one of sudden, surprised pleasure. "I'm in like Flynn, Peter," he said with a grin. "One million bucks' worth I'm in, and if we do it, even that plane won't be big enough to carry the hundred-dollar bills to the bank. Come on, boys, breakfast is waiting, and then you can take a nap until we get the go from Wasque." He walked back up the dock between the pilot and Bertram Smith, talking animately to both.

The small boy watched his father walk away, and shook his head. "I thought he just went to a bank and yelled at people. Wow, and he owns some of *this!*" He made a worshipful gesture at *Gay Enola.*

Stew Johnson gave the boy a wide smile. "Big ideas, like hurricane busting, take all kinds of people, Peter, and you're one of them. Come on, we want to get old *Enola* here alongside that inner float and well back under the tree leaves. You never know who might come snooping by overhead."

As the boy and the man pulled the Grumman deeper under the tall, spreading trees at the edge of the lake,

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the boy shook his head. "How come they're trying to stop us, saying all that dumb stuff on TV, Mr. Johnson?"

"Oh," said Stew Johnson, scratching his ear, "we just happen to be living at a time when most people like talking better than doing. But it'll all turn around, Peter. It always does."

"Well," said the boy, staring at *Gay Enola* now rocking gently deep in her shady bower, "when I grow up, that's what I'm going to be, a hurricane buster!"

The tall man put his arm around the boy's shoulders. "Peter, you remember, once you get started on something like this, it's just awfully hard to stop."

Bettina stared bitterly and almost unseeing at the operations map displayed on the biggest computer scope. They had saved *Gay Enola*, just barely, but they had paid a price. While the technician in the ops shack on the New Jersey field excitedly described the near-disaster of the takeoff and escape, Bobby had suddenly doubled over in his chair and vomited down between his legs. After five minutes of mostly dry retching, Moke had poked him with a big syringe of morphine from the medical kit, and Bobby had gone off to sleep in the corner of the room on a mattress. Bettina had been careful not to mention Bobby when Cora's one-hour call-back came, and *Gay Enola*'s narrow escape in New Jersey had swept everything else from Cora's head. Bettina's eyes were pinched and red and her face was gray, but she had managed the first phase of it, including warning the New Jersey crew, and now the final part was close, and with Bobby rested, they might get through it.

"Moke," said Bettina quietly, "you give them the lift-off final, and any other stuff they need. And send them now. There's no point waiting for another five minutes if they're ready."

Moke leaned forward and spoke. "Cora, Bettina says go when you're ready, okay? Your update vector-final is still looking good."

"Engines are on," came back Cora's deep voice. "We're light. Mark! We're airborne," and Professor Worth set the time against the digital display line, SEACRANE LAUNCH AT MORICHES, FINAL.

"We're going up," said Cora; then, more sharply, "Ray you blew a fart! I told you to go and shit...."

But riding over that was Ray's retort, "It's just your own sweet breath blowing back into your kisser, my dear," and behind this came a roar of laughter from the SeaCrane pilots.

Bettina sat back and looked over at Professor Worth with a tired smile. "Imagine trying to run this zoo without a whip and a gun," she said. "Willy, I've got to get some sleep. Moke and Walt can run the system for a couple of hours. We really don't have to sweat until they drop the *Tesla*."

Professor Worth, whose moustache now drooped somewhat in the humid morning air, sighed deeply. "Even if

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we lose Moriches to the feds now, it won't matter," he said, "but what if the marshals come here?" Bettina didn't answer. She had gone over to lie down close to Bobby, pull up a blanket, and throw a protective arm over his large, quiet form.

Sept. 8, 0800 — 1600

Claude, though still extending itself to the east, was now running straight north at over forty knots. Ahead of the eye's violently steep gradient, terminating at 28.6 inches in the core of the storm, a series of great waves ran as consorts, preparing to lead the storm ashore. In the deep water, out beyond the thousand-meter line, these wind and pressure-driven waves were only a few feet high and would pass a beleaguered vessel unnoticed in the terrible slash and confusion of the storm. But they were very long and they were driven at speeds far highter than such waves normally exhibited. As the storm accelerated, so would these leader waves gain velocity, and when they came over the Long Island and New England extensions of the Continental Shelf, their enormous energy of forward motion would be transformed in a few moments by the bottom friction into vast, tumbling breakers, forty to sixty feet high. When four such barometrically driven water waves struck the southern Rhode Island resort town of Misquamicut during the '38 storm, every house was broken into small pieces, the rubble driven a mile or more inland across a salt pond, and dozens of householders killed in an instant of smashing destruction and unimaginable violence.

The warnings increased on TV and radio, and people began to draw back from the coasts. Small towns and beach-house rows on the south Long Island coast emptied out, and in some places only the water people — charter skippers, scallopers, and cohaugers — gathered to assist each other. It's the rise in the water you've got to watch, they said to each other, that and the wind shift after the eye passes.

A big steel dragger, *Judith Ann*, with twelve aboard, lost her engines at just the wrong moment, north and east of Claude's center, the most dangerous quadrant, and was soon rolled upside down and sunk in a few moments as two huge seas came together in *Judith Ann*'s sea-space. "Killer Claude" the Globe named the storm then, and soon all the papers headlined more or less the same thing: KILLER STORM WILL STRIKE BEFORE MIDNIGHT!

Bettina and Bobby set zero hour for the attack on Claude at 1520, midafternoon, at which time they estimated Claude's eye would have reached a location 290 miles south of Montauk Point.

The mission profile for the Sea-Crane phase was for the helicopter to penetrate from the north to within the storm system as close to this attack

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point as possible, then ditch the *Tesla*. Though the boat had over a thousand horsepower that could be delivered to two big propellors, the *Tesla*'s sea surface mobility was intended mainly to correct or improve local position and to maneuver once it was inside the eye. The idea was that Claude would come to where the *Tesla* waited. The trick was to deliver the boat as close to the final moment as possible, to minimize wave pounding and damage, but not so close that the SeaCrane could not penetrate the storm's northern edge.

At about 250 miles south of Long Island, the SeaCrane's first pilot was shaking his head and fighting his buffeted machine. "Bobby," he said, "I don't think this should be pushed. This damn storm is getting wild, even this far north."

The SeaCrane staggered along at about 1,000 feet above the churning ocean, struck by vicious side-gusts and whipped by wild sprays of salt spume and rain, blown in every direction by the increasing wind. Even at this altitude, the roar of the storm wind was overwhelming, masking any other engine and airframe noises.

An acrimonious argument then started among the SeaCrane pilots, Cora and Ray; Cora wanting to press further, Ray wanting to try hooking a bit west to see if they could sneak in closer to the eye that way, and the pilots wanting to ditch the *Tesla* then and there.

Bettina now had the *Tesla*'s position established on the big system's map. "They're almost 260 miles south now, Bobby, and Ray can run south and gain some more miles. Do it! Get the thing into the water!"

"It isn't that bad, yet, damn it," said Cora, starting to argue again.

"Shut up, Cora!" said Bobby sharply, and she stopped talking at once. "I'm the system's manager and I order you to ditch *now*. Commence your descent." He wiped his forehead unsteadily. "The *Nimbus* interferometer is showing mean wave height of only five or six feet under you. Ray can run at least some of the way south if you start now, Cora." He said this more quietly and slowly.

"We're at 500," came the pilot's voice. "Very stiff, turbulence bad and visibility is zilch ... 300 ... two ... whup, almost caught us that time.... Okay, 50 feet, we're staggering, 20 ... prepare to drop, Ray."

"Safety locks off," said Ray.

"Disconnect," said the pilot, "you're free, Ray," and the *Tesla* fell ten feet to hit the choppy ocean surface with a giant splash as the SeaCrane, free of its huge burden, darted up and off to the west like a dragonfly caught in a sudden upward wind gust.

The pilot cabin of *Tesla* contained two side-by-side foam-padded seats that could be reclined for sleeping. Ray, in the left-hand (or pilot's) position, navigated the *Tesla* with his wheel and throttles, and he now engaged the propellers and started off

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through the white, breaking chop at a good eight knots. The boat took some bad thumps and hammering from the steep waves, and Cora looked over at her small, intent husband with a sneer. "Slow up, dummy. We exceeded our allowed shock limits twice in thirty seconds."

"I thought you wanted to go south," said Ray, making a lip fart, but he eased back on the throttles and the *Tesla* went more easily, now only snap-rolling occasionally when an especially large sea swept over her whale-shaped upper body. But the day was dark, and it grew darker as they struggled slowly south.

At a little before 1300, *Gay Enola* lifted off the small private lake into a wet, now-blustery, rain-filled sky and made a graceful circle to the east. Only three people saw the start of the mission: the short banker, his son, and the crew chief, and they all waved from the float as *Gay Enola* lifted off the water in a spatter of white foam. Stew Johnson soberly watched them rise and finally fly out of sight, then thoughtfully bit his lip. "Mr. Heartshorn, I don't know whom rich bankers pray to in a tight corner, but maybe you ought to try it now for those two men."

But Peter Heartshorn's eyes were like stars, and he hugged his father. "I'd give anything to be there with them. *Anything!*"

Gay Enola climbed and climbed as she sped east, and there was darkness and turmoil at every level. Thunderstorms were dodged near the coast, with Bettina's help, and finally the Grumman broke into clearer air at 20,000 feet, and turned on the final-vector run into the eye. The turbulence and updrafts were fierce and continuous, but *Gay Enola* was approaching Claude's great heart from the west, where the headlong, forward run of the storm subtracted part of the force of the rotary storm winds. Higher and higher they went until, a little after 1500, *Gay Enola* burst through some high scudding cloud and entered the vast and open oval eye of Hurricane Claude. Below, everywhere, were sloping, steaming banks of cloud, ranged in a mounting, ridged vortex of unimaginable proportions. Along that rough yet shockingly organized confusion ran thinner sheets and daggers of ripped, slashed cloud, torn out of the face by the howling circular winds.

Bertram Smith had started the big generator which comprised *Gay Enola*'s main payload, and now he looked down from a hull blister and talked to Bobby Winthrop.

"It's quite lovely, Bobby," he said in his high, calm voice, "but, oh my, so big!"

As they flew further east, the whole shape of the eye became apparent, opening out beneath them, and in the slanting afternoon sun that burned brightly above they caught a glimpse of the white froth and dark confusion of water surface through the smother

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of cloud far, far below. And as Smith peered intently, he saw, suddenly and faintly, a tiny wink, an intense speck of light against the dirty gray-white of racing clouds and raging sea.

"Bobby," he said, "I see Ray and Cora's flasher. They're north of us, maybe six miles."

"We have them near you," said Bobby. "Ray, keep that xenon beacon going. *Gay Enola* can see you now."

Ray grunted in assent. The last half hour had been the worst for the *Tesla*, as everyone had expected, and even the partial lowering of an antiroll keel had not prevented two or three near-total upsets. Through all this, Ray had maintained a running fire of remarks about yorking and Dramamine, especially annoying since Cora had never been seasick in her life, but she had her revenge when it took Ray ten minutes to urinate into his little seat container, a process Cora did not help by making pointed suggestions and coarse insults about Ray's inadequacies.

The waves were gigantic on the northern edge of the eye, and impossible to anticipate since visibility was down to ten feet in a continual, horizontal blast of torn wave tops. The *Tesla* rolled halfway over in a wild cross-sea, caught an especially vicious blast of dense rain, and then, an improbable miracle, came out into sunshine. In a few minutes, Cora could see partway up the huge funnel of cloud sweeping around them, an endless, complex, wildly moving structure, beyond imagination and beyond hope. For an instant, Cora's heart turned to water and her breath caught in her throat. It was impossible. There was too much of it.

"Losing your nerve, Cora?" said mean, sharp-eyed Ray, for he had seen that moment of weakness, that flicker of dissolution in his wife's face. "Kind of like pissing on the sun to put it out, eh?" he snarled.

"Connect up the generators, put the keel all the way down, and cut the bullshit, Ray," said Cora in a steady voice. "Bobby, I'm erecting the electrode mast."

"Do it!" came the words right back. "I'm bringing *Gay Enola* north over you along the storm track. Bettina thinks the northern edge of the storm is in a near state of instability now, because of this wild forward velocity, so I'm going to plug you both in as soon as we get vertical alignment with *Gay Enola*. How's the sea state?"

"Bad. We're rolling twenty degrees, but it's getting less and the keel helps. The mast is up and we're getting some stability as the wind drops. Bobby, we're sitting in warm sunshine."

"Steady," said Bobby to both his distant charges. "You set, Bertie?"

"Our electrode is down and the generator is running. Just give the word, Bobby. How big it all is. Oh my!"

"Hold it, we're coming up on alignment," said Bobby in his tightest voice, and clustered around his chair in front

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of the systems map display were the four other members of the Wasque vectoring team. Five pairs of eyes watched the tiny light point that identified *Gay Enola* move up the screen to finally cover the steady point that showed where the *Tesla* pitched and waited.

"Now," breathed four voices.

"We've got alignment!" shouted Bobby. "Hit it!" Over the speakers came simultaneous confirmation from Cora and Bertram Smith in identical words "Field is on! Full power!"

In the strange, sun-drenched, seemingly benign eye, the *Tesla*'s 5 million-volt field immediately set up a huge cloud of ionized air and water vapor. This immense field immediately drew solid strikes from low clouds to the north, and these flashing, ionizing trails crossed and drew more strikes, so that in less than ten seconds the entire sky over the *Tesla* was filled with continual, massive ripples of lightning. But there was no thunder to these displays. The bolts did not discharge a static cloud and then stop, allowing the colder, surrounding air to roar back in. They were replenished by the giant, rotational motion of Claude itself. The ripple of fire now rode rapidly up the air column, strikes and bolts opening up new current paths everywhere.

To Ray and Cora, it seemed almost like an explosion of electrical fire around them, harder and brighter than the sun, but a slow explosion taking almost a full minute to reach its peak, and when the sky was totally filled with rippling, wavering, expanding bolts, they dropped sunshade lenses over their goggles and saw only that they were bathed in the brightest, most intense, yet coldest light they had ever seen.

At the top of the storm, when *Gay Enola*'s field was switched on, the path was longer, about a thousand feet down to the towed electrode, and so the glowing field was both longer and thinner, but within a few moments the field had drawn strikes and the whirl of electrical discharges had disappeared down into the maw, where a white, intense glow was flowing upward. A moment later, the gigantic circuit was completed and sustained from top to bottom. Later, Techoceanics' atmospheric physics group estimated the maximum current flow at peak activity at over a billion amperes. Claude's entire eye was filled with electrical fire, and its fearsome integration, its wonderful, deadly balance was destroyed in an instant.

Only four persons actually observed that climactic moment, and to them it was simply a sense of light so intense and increasing so rapidly in intensity that the world became entirely light. And though the *Nimbus IV* cameras surely caught that vast, sudden glow of Claude's death, the vision passed unseen by all the world because when the final circuit was complete, the explosive production of electromagnetic, longwave radiation, blasting

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and bouncing around the earth, interrupted every channel of nonwire communication of the globe with a static disturbance so strong that absolutely no signal transfer was completed for several minutes. So bank balances were upset, phone connections lost, and TV programs interrupted, and the greatest electromagnetic signal to be generated in the history of the planet was sent out in all directions to tell even the stars of Claude's sudden end.

In the Wasque operations center, they heard the static scream begin, and saw the TV pictures dissolve to shards of jagged confusion, and they stared at each other in elated disbelief. Of all the communications specialists, everywhere in the world, attempting to retrieve some signal or bit of information at that moment, they, most of all, understood the meaning of that blast of wild electromagnetic confusion. The speakers buzzed and screeched, but no one touched a volume knob.

"That's old Claude dying, good buddy," said Moke, throwing his arm around Walter Nunes's shoulders, "and you know what he's screaming over those speakers while mean old Ray and tough old Cora shove a lightning bolt up his ass? 'Why me?' that's what he's saying, 'Why *me?*' "

"Look at that electromagnetic disruption!" said exultant Professor Worth. "My God, think of that energy release! This is unbelievable!"

"I wonder how our friends are doing in this?" said Bettina soberly, and they watched and waited, for what seemed like hours but was no more than two and a half minutes, until the screens began to clear and the wavery images to strengthen. And when the pictures came back from *Nimbus*, at Wasque, and in Boston, and Miami, and many other places, several dozen sharp intakes of breath occured simultaneously, for in that smallest interval, Claude was irrevocably changed. The eye was collapsing. They could see the deep instability ripples on the northern edge begin to smear and overrun the eye. The sharp, crisp look of the hurricane vortex was being ruined and the eye was disappearing, losing its form and identity.

As that final collapse accelerated, Claude's agony intensified, and the storm finally difurcated, broke apart at about 8,000 feet, and the downward-moving pressure wave hit the *Tesla*, cushioned by the sea, with no more than a tremendous thump of overpressure.

What happened in the next five minutes at the sea surface was far worse. The winds, which had been no more that 90 miles an hour along Claude's northern sector, now began to switch direction and to accelerate to brief, sudden gusts of more than 300 miles an hour. Since this brief, wild reversal of direction occured in a vertical sense as well, these sudden, huge gusts caught hailstones and sent them at immense speeds through the wet clouds until they were a large as lemons or

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baseballs, then drove these hard and deadly missiles around inside the storm interior like a million random cannon shots.

The *Tesla*, her mast torn and battered away, was suddenly beset by a massive hailstorm that penetrated the hull in several places with thunderous crashes, the entire bombardment producing a deafening roar of damage as the ice balls broke apart on impact with shuddering force and rocketed off to continue their screaming courses downwind.

Ray instantly curled up in a tight ball in his seat, his arms over his head, but Cora turned and snarled, "We're holed, stupid! Come on, get off your ass! We're sinking! We'll get back to you later, Bobby...."

Yet that message of alarm and danger was not the worst to come. The people at Wasque, and in the *Tesla*, listened mutely, their stomachs constricted in fear and anguish as Milton Stein spoke steadily from a background of wild noises and obvous transmission problems. "We lost an engine, Bobby. Turbulence just ripped it out of the wing. Never seen this sort of air movement before. Very wild, very strong. We're in a flat spin and the tail controls seem to be severed."

"Milt, Bertie, get in the capsule! Get out, Milt!"

"We're trying, Bobby. Listen, I'm going to try an inflight prop reversal with the other engine, to break the spin. Maybe we can get clear then."

"You'll tear off a wing!" shrieked Bobby, but the signal from *Gay Enola* went suddenly and completely dead, and Bobby's flushed, intense expression instantly vanished. He half-rose and turned to Bettina with a vague, puzzled expression on his face. "Bettina, help me, plea—" and he fell forward on his knees and then onto his face, and his right foot made a terrifying little tattoo of three or four thumps on the floor.

"Moke! Willy! He's dying!" screamed Bettina, and in an instant Moke had Bobby turned on his back and was listening intently at his chest. "Oh man, his ticker's stopped!" said Moke at once. "Come on, old buddy," he pointed a finger at Nunes, "you took the course, too. You pump and I'll puff. I don't smoke that wheezy old reefer your woman grows in those window boxes."

"Bettina," said Professor Worth in a low, worried voice, "Quick! Give him a shot of heart stimulant!" He pulled the big medical kit off its shelf and opened it on the floor next to Bobby. While Bettina desperately stripped wrappings from the disposable syringe and then drove the needle into Bobby's right arm and Walter Nunes pushed downward in rhythm to give the heart massage through Bobby's chest, Moke expertly cleared Bobby's tongue with a forward finger sweep and began to puff air into his mouth while watching Bobby's chest rise and fall. On the fourth puff, Moke saw Bobby's eyes

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fly open and look directly into his, and he lifted his mouth and sent him back a grin and a wink. Bobby gave several rattling coughs, but his color was coming back a bit and he finally returned a weak wink. "Moke, dear, I didn't know you cared," he said in a faint voice. "How come you didn't mention it?"

Bettina knelt by Bobby's head and the tears streamed down her face. "Baby, don't leave me again! Oh, Bobby, my sweet, don't go away!"

Bobby took, then squeezed her hand. "I'm not going anyplace, Bettina. I got where I'm going."

But Bettina was now down across him, her lips against his pale cheek, and she was speaking with a passionate intensity. "Bobby, listen, we'll do all those things you want. We'll go to Club Med, for weeks, *months*, Bobby! And I'll get a bikini, *ten* bikinis! Oh, I promise. I love you, my darling Bobby!"

Bobby reached a large arm up and over and hugged Bettina closer. "You'll wear a bikini, really, on those beaches, Bettina?"

"Only until you take it off me, baby," said Bettina in a new, sultry voice, snuggling closer and softly catching his lower lip in both of hers.

Moke looked up from his watch and released Bobby's right wrist so he could now encircle Bettina with both arms. "That's the kind of talk that gets that old mother pumping again," he said in a formal, consulting-room voice.

But now Professor Worth gave a shout of amazement and joy. "Hey! We've got *two* signals now! They must have gotten down in the escape capsule. Bobby, we're getting a message from the *Tesla* emergency transponder — 'Leaks fixed. Vessel totally disabled. Awaiting rescue' — but now there's a second radio beacon signal showing on the plot, six miles to the east!"

Everyone stared at the professor, and Bobby made a motion to sit up, but Bettina restrained him with chidings and kisses. "Are they modulating it?" said Bobby in a low voice.

"Not yet," said the professor in a tense and expectant voice. "It's sending the automatic recognition signal for the *Gay Enola* capsule.... Wait ... wait, here comes some modulation.... Wait ... wait ... message is, 'Tell the underwriters we want a Blackbird and a drone the next time.' Message repeating...."

"What's a Blackbird?" said Bettina.

Moke shook his head in admiration. "One of those big spy planes, 90,000 feet, Mach 3," he said. "Old Milt will be king of the sky in one of those mothers. He can pop ten Claudes and never lift a wing."

But at this moment the door to the communication building flew open, and five large federal marshals crowded in, two with rifles pointed at the floor, all with brown tie shoes and new yellow, yachting slickers over their suit coats. "Everybody line up against the...." said the leader, but his voice

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trailed away as he saw the open medical kit, the grouping around prone Bobby, and Bettina passionately kissing his face and whispering in his ear.

Professor Wilson Worth's face turned to stone and his expression to one of total contempt. "Who the hell gave you people permission to land here? This is private property. Get back to your damned boat!"

But Moke was up on his feet, a huge smile across his face, his hand extended in friendly greeting as he strode across the room. "Where're your manners, Willy?" he said briskly. "Can't you see who these folks are?" He seized the bewildered marshal's hand. "Why, it's the Brownshoe Hurricane Protection Society. Put me down for ten bucks, boys," he said expansively, "I haven't given at the office."

Sept. 8, 1600 — Sept. 9, 0930

The destruction of Claude's core spread disorganization outward in all directions. The polar air mass to the west, sensing weakness and disorder, now flowed inexorably eastward throughout the evening, and most of Claude's western energy excesses disappeared in a heavy series of offshore rains and thundersqualls. To the east, the dying storm set several small and feeble children in motion, truncated, circumscribed pools of low barometer that were mostly eaten by the Greenland air mass or that spun themselves to death while moving and feeding from the same depleted patch of cooler ocean as their neighbors.

The great leader waves, no longer driven by a fifty-knot barometer hammer, turned into tremendously long-swell, low humps of water losing speed to friction and identity to the natural process of separation by period. As they came onto the south Long Island coast, they mounted the shallows close to shore, and suddenly, almost from nowhere, a series of steep, sharp, far-separated breakers hammered the Moriches, Shinnecock, and other inlets with high, regular surf, completely blocking the entrances for several hours. But no one was out facing Claude, and when the breakers dropped and were replaced by a steady hiss of sullen, hot rain, the boat and water people looked at each other and shook their heads in wonder at the miracle of their deliverance. At least a hundred old, wrinkled men turned to another hundred, identically leathery friends and they all said more or less the same thing, "What in Tophet won't they think of next!"

The deluge of 300-mile-an-hour hail had turned the high-tech interior of the *Tesla* into a wrecked shambles. Cora and Ray had managed to plug the holes near the waterline with expanding putty, so the *Tesla* could roll and wallow without shipping more water, but the switch-gear for the engines, the communications equipment, and most of everything else was in ruin. For a

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while they amused themselves with the hand pump, getting water out of the *Tesla*, each berating the other for any slow or partial strokes during turns at the pump handle.

The rolling and pitching slowly abated, though the rain came down steadily, drumming on the aluminum hull. Cora lay tiredly back in her seat and her thoughts turned hard and bitter. They had won, but they had paid too high a price. She remembered Milton's Stein's calm, professional voice as he spoke of death and ruin in a flat spin, just before the *Tesla*'s radio gear was smashed by a grapefruit-sized lump of ice. Their hard-fought triumph seemed spoiled and stupid.

At that moment Ray, who was peering at his bare feet and his socks, hanging on the control wheel to dry, said in a thoughtful voice, "I wonder if fags get to go to heaven?"

The comment seemed entirely too much for Cora, and she bared her large teeth in rage, then turned to Ray. "Listen," she said in her most acid tone, "do you realize why you've got this stupid thing about hating homosexuals, Ray? I'm going to tell you. You had something going with Van Stevens, either in your head or for real, and when he died piloting in that crazy thunderhead project you organized, you just flipped right over the edge on that subject. You should go to a shrink, Ray. You're sick in the head!"

But for once, Ray made no answer or change of expression, and Cora, replaying those cruel words in her own head, realized she had gone over the edge herself. She reached and put her hand on Ray's arm. "Ray, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. We're both upset over this, over Milt and Bertie." But even this dropping of her defenses had no effect on thoughtful Ray, and he said nothing more while the clouds cleared away and a big yellow sun popped up over the rim. Fifty yards away, Techoceanics' substantial recovery vessel, *Alessandro Volta*, stopped to put down her power launch to take off Cora and Ray, then fasten the falls from a stern-mounted A-frame to bring the battered *Tesla* aboard. Nearby, two big offshore cutters, *Dauntless* and *Intrepid*, carried the overflow of important guests who had come to see the heroes be rescued amid the ruins of the storm they broke in half. Elected officials, important persons in the federal meteorological establishment, and high-level bureaucrats including a secretary or two from several departments, watched from the cutters, but not, as the *Times* sarcastically noted in a waspish editorial about federal meddling, anyone from Justice or the federal judiciary.

While the launch brought still-silent Ray and introspective Cora across to the *Volta*, a big Coast Guard machine descended onto the after platform of the *Dauntless*, and still more dignitaries climbed rapidly out of the helicopter cabin to peer across at them.

The chop was still two or three feet

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high, but Cora, then Ray, made the jump to the lowered, slanting ladder and clambered up to the main deck of the *Volta*. All the hurricane modification team and its friends had been brought out by a triumphant Techoceanics Corporation. Bobby, white and grinning and allowed to come only because the doctors knew his not being there would be even more harmful, was held tightly around the waist by a slim, now happy and thus pretty, Bettina in a bright and shapely dress. Arthur Goodspeed looked exhausted, a thousand years old, and completely at peace, and beside him stood Professor Worth, Moke Mogamo, and Walter Nunes. Nearby was a completely dazzled Peter Heartshorn, clutching his father's hand. Mr. Heartshorn's pouched and puffed cheeks gave him the aspect of an overweight squirrel finally, happily, ready for the winter. Stew Johnson held Peter's other hand and now and then explained some technical point to the gaping boy in a stern, professional whisper.

Clustered together near the front were the Hartford people, many more now and including the great man himself, B.B. Broadhurst, president of gigantic Hartford Fire and Casualty and chairman of the Underwriters Weather Modification Group. Taller than his lieutenants, his silver mane of hair was a shine of power in the TV lights.

But as Cora and Ray stepped from the ladder to the deck, to loud cheers and applause from everyone and hoots from the cutters' sirens, the first people they saw were Stein and Smith, for the small escape capsule and its large parachute had been taken from the water only a half hour before by the *Volta*, and the two men stood in their mussed coveralls, their bulky flying suits still over their arms, beaming at everybody.

At that moment, the most extraordinary thing of all happened. Ray, his eyes suddenly blinded by tears, dashed unsteadily forward with a cry of "Oh, thank God!" and flung himself on the astonished pilot, sweeping up an owlishly blinking Bertram Smith with his other arm, and then kissing and hugging them both with babblings of thanksgiving and praise.

Bobby, who stepped forward to shake Cora's hand, stopped in arrested amazement. "Cora," he said softly, "what in the hell have you been drinking on that boat?" But Cora only blinked at the cameras and said nothing.

Biddle Bonniford Broadhurst strode hastily across the deck, his large, liver-spotted hands wide in welcome, then clasped Ray, Milton, and Bertram Smith in his own huge embrace, beaming back at the cameras. "Come on, Cora," he shouted, "Get over here! You earned it, lady, and I'm going to give it to you!"

Soon the four heroes were separated and adjusted, two on each side of looming B.B. Broadhurst, who fished a large-size certified bank check from his pocket and turned, bowing low and

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gracefully to Cora, who smiled fearsomely and seized the check. "One million dollars, Cora. Less than a tenth of a percent of Claude's loss potential for us, and more to come," said Broadhurst, making large, expansive gestures. He turned and bowed again to Milton Stein. "And Captain Stein, we received your message loud and clear in Hartford about the Blackbird, and we're going to get you *two* of them."

That was too much for Ray. "Oh hell, B.B.," he snarled, "just give us one and hand the other one to Israel. Then that damn-fool judge, what's his name ... Farbgold, Silverfarb, Goldenfinger ... will electrocute those college-punk environmental freaks...."

Fortunately, most of this was made confused or inaudible by a combination of Cora's loudest snarls and by both Bobby and B.B. Broadhurst stepping rapidly forward with loud, agitated laughter. Broadhurst waved his arms wildly at the others. "Come on, you giant-killers, get in the picture, all of you!" he roared in all directions.

As they pressed noisily forward, Moke said in Bettina's ear, "Man, I'm really glad to see that old Ray is okay. I figgered he'd been beaned by one of those ice balls when he kissed Milt and Aunt Bertie."

"Oh, give Ray his moment of sweetness, Moke," said a smiling Bettina. "Nobody's completely imperfect. Remember what you said on the way over to Wasque?"

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The idea of Ray's sweetness had turned Moke's agile mind in another direction. He leaned back, while B.B. noisily tried to get them adjusted for the TV shots, so that Bobby, Bettina, Nunes, and Professor Worth could hear. "Did you guys ever actually picture Ray and Cora making it together?" he asked in a quiet voice. "I mean totally undressed, on a giant, queen-sized motel bed with a bottle of gin on the nightstand."

So sudden and unlikely was this vision that Bobby, Bettina, Nunes, and the professor simultaneously doubled over in attempts to stifle their uncontrollable laughter. As the TV lights and cameras panned across the assembling group, Walter Nunes's mother, Isobel, sitting proudly in her New Bedford parlor to watch her son honored on TV as one of the tiny team of hurricane busters, was dismayed to see him bent, helpless, in a convulsive laughing fit. "Well, he never did take much of anything seriously," she said apologetically to the other women.

Her next-door neighbor, Rose Meideros, snorted. "So, and what's wrong with enjoying yourself? And look, those two big shots and that old professor are broken up, too."

That observation mollified Isobel Nunes somewhat, but she thoughtfully shook her head. "Still, see how straight, how dignified and proud that big colored boy who works with Walt stands there. He went to Harvard, Walter told me. My, what a difference that makes!"

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Books

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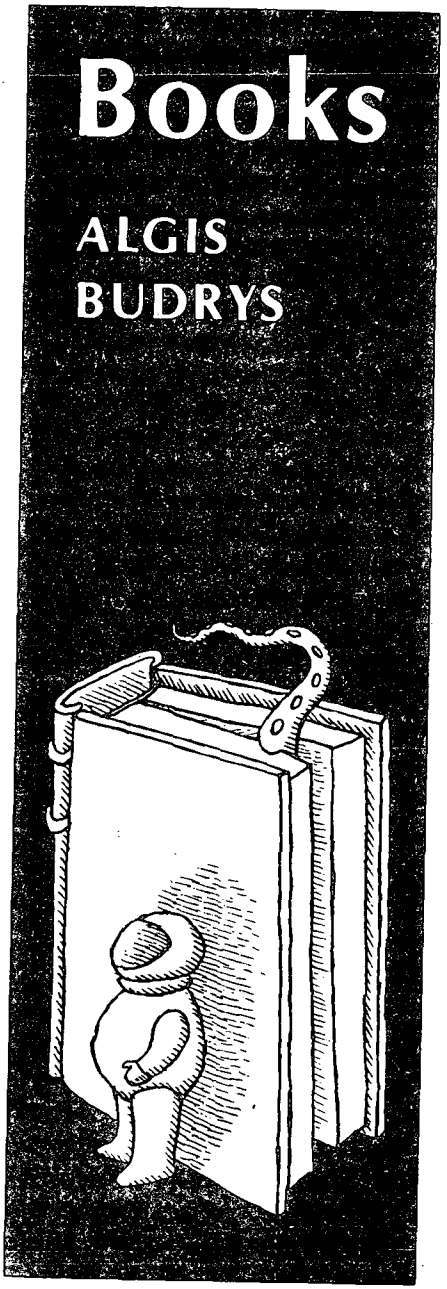

The Citadel of the Autarch, Gene Wolfe, Timescape, $15.95.

Paperback Price Guide #2, Kevin Hancer, Harmony Div., Crown Publishers, $9.95.

The Official Underground and Newave Comix Price Guide, Jay Kennedy, Harmony, $9.95.

The Book of the New Sun is the book of the old Sun. Severian the Lame, only months after leaving the Torturers' guildhall, is the vastly experienced Autarch. Vodalus is dead offstage; Agia has attained to his place in the intricacy of things. And *The Citadel of the Autarch* puts me in mind of the messenger problem, for reasons which I hope will come clear.

The beginnings of the messenger problem are to be found in a phenomenon described thirty years ago, I think in *Saturday Review*, via an essay entitled "The King, Sir, is Much Better!" The author — I wish I could remember the name — had been a bit-player on the stage. He described the temptations that inch up on people who are among the least members of the company, yet for a moment have all attention focussed on them.

Imagine, for instance, that moment when the Prince, played by Laurence Olivier, waits with all his entourage, poised to launch himself and the next four acts into motion, attendant upon news of his distant father. The messenger, stumbling in all smoke-stained and lathered, is supposed to cry the king's death. But suppose....

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Ah. The actors playing the court all gape in consternation, Olivier smites his brow, and out in the audience we hear the first titter that will instantly swell into an avalanchine uproar. The fellow playing Messenger stares around him. He, too, is now aghast at what has happened; the moment, so long anticipated, has passed in a microsecond, and now, falling upon him without recourse is the rest of his life.

Forget it. What happens is that Olivier unhesitatingly barks: "Soldiers! Take out this lunatic imposter straight away, and bring me back true word of how my father fares!" Olivier, you see, has been a bit-player in his time, and knows more about how that feels than bit-players do about how it is to be Olivier with Olivier's resources.

But the play is not, thou wittest, back on the playwright's intended track, although all the dialogue and action can now proceed as if it were. For no one, actors or audience, can forget what the messenger did. It has been negated in terms of the play, but not of the performance. Part of the audience, and all of the actors, are fully aware of what happened. The rest of the audience, consisting of those people who had no idea of what the proper line was, spends some portion of its attention wondering when the lunatic is going to come back into the story.

So what happens is that a play is performed, and perhaps quite superbly, but it is not the intended play, not what the audience paid to see. To some extent, this new play must win its own audience from among those who came to see the expected play.

Now. It's become impossible to simply produce a piece of work. We live in a world fraught with messengers. We hear an announcement that Gene Wolfe and Pocket/Timescape have signed a contract for a tetralogy. Then we hear from Budrys, among others, that the first book is dynamite. (And if we are patient and cunning, we can even divine, from what Budrys says, what Budrys thinks we'll think of the book if we think like Budrys.) Then we hear the book — *The Shadow of the Torturer* — is winning major awards.

By the time the second book, *The Claw of the Conciliator*, has appeared, it cannot stand on its own merits. Perhaps it shouldn't have to, but there is something vaguely troublesome about a piece of art that doesn't have all its options. And the third book, *The Sword of the Lictor*, emerges from a penumbra of similar messages crowding so close upon each other that you hardly know which won the Hugo, which the Nebula, and which the Howard. What you do know is that something unique and intricately majestic is supposed to be going on. (And, presuming your taste is at all like that of the majority, your own reading confirms this impression to some convincing extent.)

But what, exactly, *is* going on? Are you, as you pick up *The Citadel of the*

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Autarch, beginning to read the book Gene Wolfe wrote, or the book you expect? And if it is the book you expect, is your expectation based on what you have found in the preceding three books, or is it based on what you have been told about them, and about the suddenly announced fifth book which might or might not join seamlessly with the fourth?*

Damned if I know. I will, however, tell you one thing for sure: If you expect to get your recompense out of these books, you had better sit down and read them all again, from the beginning, after you have read *Citadel*.

One reason for this is that Wolfe has written a book whose four parts are so skewed in time that they might be said to be happening simultaneously. When we began with *Torturer*, the main assumption here, and everywhere else as far as I know, was that we had a rite-of-passage novel. We were getting to know a young man, and following his adventures, in order to see how he grew. This expectation imposed a certain linearity on the story. It gave us a thread to follow while, all around us, Wolfe was exploding bombs, tripping trap-doors, unfurling peacocks' tails and playing counterpoint. But this turns out to have been only the most cunning of Wolfe's false trails. I'm not sure that one of the things he most intended doing was to describe a time in which rites of passage have no applicability, but that is one of the things he has done.

It's not possible to deduce what he intended doing. Not without carefully re-reading all four books and hoping the fifth doesn't contradict your conclusions. All right, that's not a mandatory exercise in any case. But it's also not possible to deduce what he has done, intentionally or not, on the mere and insufficient strength of having read all the books once and in the proper order. (I'm almost tempted to put quote marks around "proper".) The case is not helped by the fact that in *Citadel* Wolfe as good as tells you this is happening to your mind. Specifically, he swears he has left no loose ends; he does say, with justified confidence, that we may not have noticed some of them when they were being tucked in.

That's an echo of the self-confidence with which, in closing *Claw*, he mock-marveled at anyone who wanted to read more. The really good ones, you know, are fully and meticulously aware of the effects they're creating.

But, here it is: Is *The Book of the*

Here's something else that might influence your impression. At some point, a fannish newsmagazine reported that the fourth book would be titled The Castle of the Otter. *Wolfe, although a deadly serious writer, is a puckish creator. Consequently, for those of you who don't already know,* he is now additionally writing a book called The Castle of the Otter. *This might, or might not, be followed by* The Otter of the Castle. *The man is blessed with a divine afflatus; such an appetite for creativity had not been seen among us in a generation.*

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New Sun a true masterwork, or is it a work that gives the impression of being a masterwork? If it's a masterwork, is it the work Wolfe intended, and/or, if that's not important, is it the work you think it is?

Forgive me for playing with our minds in this manner; some of it is natural response to what I've just finished reading, and some of it is my own natural fascination with the metaphysics of art. We don't have to take it too seriously. For one thing, the same questions can be asked about any artwork, and the answer, generally, is Does it really matter? In fact, the next question is How on Earth could you avoid asking this of any object, let alone of a piece of creativity? But in Wolfe's case, we have a case of the question being begged.

I can't really describe *Citadel* to you. It would be a disservice, one, and I'm not sure I could, two. In fact, I'm sure I couldn't — not on as much reading as I've given it. But I can describe its effect; I've done some of that already, and the rest of it is that the effect is of being conveyed inside an engine so intricate and so encompassing in its operations that it would take years to recall every subcomponent that went into a millisecond of its operations. As of this moment, I can't be sure what it does, or even if it does anything, tell you the truth. I'm too bombarded by messages, from outside, from inside, and from Wolfe, that tell me something's happening.

It is — it surely is — a major event in this field. It resounds with memorable characters, unforgettable scenes, and moments of sheer inventiveness so apt that lesser talents will be writing "novels" based on ripoffs of them. Whether it is actually telling us something about life is another matter. The difference is the difference between a Faberge egg and a figure by Praxiteles; the difference between breathtaking craftsmanship displayed for its own sake and breathtaking craftsmanship devoted to a veritable statement. It's too soon to know which, and, considering the adumbrations, it may be too soon for quite some time.

But let me tell you, whether the King is dead or the King is much better, it's a hell of a piece of theater.

Some months ago, as may have happened to you at some point in time, I resolved to clean out the attic, and there were all those books I've been carrying from place to place since I was nine. I found myself delving through the strata of a life — four decades' worth of taste, and more. Three station-wagon loads later, I had been in and out of the used-book business. (Fear not — it is still not possible to find a bare spot on my shelves and, oddly enough, I have just as many full cartons in the attic as I ever did.)

The used-book business, as I was about to say, is a strange place. I have never been a bibliophile, except that I

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despise a cheaply manufactured book whose high price is justified in part by what they call "Alabama Flash" in the mobile home manufacturing trade. By and large, I keep a book because, for instance, I went without lunches to buy it, or it's part of my basic library of SF and is thus, in a sense, part of my reference library.

The rest I'm content to store in my head, except for a few score rapidly deteriorating paperbacks I re-read regularly — C.S. Forester, Nevil Shute, Eric Ambler, Geoffrey Household, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler; that bunch — and the latter are replaced with fresher editions as I come across them. So I am not of the sort to prowl bookstores located on back streets, and I really don't know a quarto from an octavo. While I'm not proud of my ignorance, I think it sufficiently balanced by my knowledge of what goes on inside Sturmey-Archer gearboxes. To each his arcanum, as the bishop said to the actress.

Nevertheless, the used-book business is a strange place of which I have now gained some small knowledge. One of those crumbs is that there are many, many other people out there who have recently come to believe they have Gold in The Attic.

Part of the reason for this rather sudden appearance of a rather large group of would-be booksellers has to be the changing economic climate. A fair number of people are beginning to search their possessions for resources. (One of the reasons we went into the attic is that children who used to have apartments of their own are suddenly looking hard for cheap living-space.) Another, however, is the appearance of a market for old paperbacks and comics. Not many people, really, have a lot of first-edition Dickens in the family, but most of us in SF or on its fringes are the sort of people who tend to have egg-crates full of thirty-year-old material the trade used to call ephemera.

There's always been trade in paperbacks and comics — particularly comics — that was worth the trouble to dig 'em up, dust 'em off, and move 'em out. But not until the 1980 appearance of Kevin Hancer's *Paperback Price Guide* did the news get out to the general public. Or so it seems to me; like most people, I was aware there were "listings" and catalogues of specific offerings by dealers, but not until the Hancer was I aware of a book that attempted to publish a price for every paperback in existence. Equipped with such a book, I could sit down with my treasures and discover, for instance, that if I still had my near-mint copy of *Lady on a Train* in the Bonded Mystery series, it would be worth $12.*

**My mother threw it out, along with a ten-year run of* Astoundings, *while I was away at college. On the other hand, she carefully saved and righteously turned over to me a couple of crates full of Ziff-Davis pulp* Amazings *I subsequently had a hard time giving away.*

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This, or course, is a sort of illusion. (1) The Hancer catalog was — and is — not yet complete; (2) If you had a copy of *Lady on a Train* it would not be near-mint unless you had kept it in a helium-flooded safe; (3) You would have to find someone who wanted it at that price. That is, you would have to become a dealer yourself, because few dealers would buy it from you for more than two or three dollars. Dealers are aware that it takes several dollars to sell a book at $12, and often quite a bit of time spent on a search for the buyer.

Hancer does his level best to explain this, both directly in essays in the *Guide* and by carrying ads from dealers, some of whom offer to buy books at a low percentage of the Hancer price and don't seem at all abashed to say so. So when you discover, in the recent *Guide #2*, that a near-mint copy of *Gentlemen Junkie* in the first edition is worth $60.00, (it sold for 50¢ in 1961), this does not mean your ship has come in if you have one. All it means is that Kevin Hancer thinks somewhere in this world of ours is someone who would pay you that if you found him and no one else had found him first.

Which brings us to the fact that once the Hancer was out, thousands of people dove into their storage spaces, and books that had been considered vanishingly scarce suddenly turned out not to be as rare as all that.

Take heart, however. It happens that SF paperbacks, more than almost any others, more, even, than all but a few sexploitation books, command higher prices than paperbacks of any other sort. (The three big categories are SF, sexploitation, and crossword-puzzle books.) Hancer also teaches you how to evaluate books, and any number of other useful and interesting facts. He reproduces a great many covers in black and white, and some in color, so that the total effect is almost that of reading an almanac. The years and the memories roll on ... *Tarzan and The Lost Empire* ... *The Saint's Choice of Impossible Crime* ... *The Sin Shouter of Cabin Road*....

I really do recommend it; to bibliophonts, naturally, but also to nostalgists and historians. *Guide #2* is half again as thick as #1, contains listings totally missing from its predecessor — Regency Books, for one — and yet costs no more.

With it, I strongly recommend Jay Kennedy's *The Official Underground and Newave Comix Price Guide.*

Comix, as distinguished from comics, are, in Kennedy's own definition, the underground work that began appearing at around the time of the 1960s' troubles. "Underground" as distinguished from under-the-counter meant that they were, often, available on open display at major newsstands. Not all of them, and I stress "major," but they took their characteristic from their content, not their distribution.

Many of these publications are and

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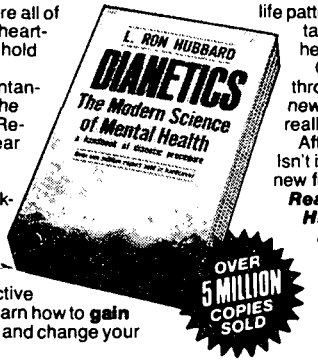

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were Bad Stuff — subversive of Home and Mother, punctative of all that is dear to the Middle Class, and, dare one say it, often in rotten taste. Some, as a matter of fact, were and are stunningly inept. But be that as it may — and if you haven't ever seen one, you probably should — they have now gone the route all revolutionaries go, and have become institutionalized. Thus, they have become collectible. And because they were published in short runs and distributed spottily, they have become eminently collectible. A copy of *Fleshapoids from Earth* is worth $17.50 according to Kennedy.

Again, the SF component in this market is stronger than any other, so the chances are you have some of the li'l devils tucked away somewhere, or know someone who does. Again, all the cautions cited re. the paperback market are to be borne in mind here. But the Kennedy *Guide*, even more than the Hancer, is worth having not only for its ostensible purpose but as a document.

The nostalgias it evokes are narrower and more intensely specialized, the histories it represents are less likely to be repeated elsewhere. Furthermore, Kennedy has included a series of essays by early comix pioneers, and a series of photographs of these countercultural heroes. So even if you have no mercantile interest in it, the Kennedy *Guide* serves a valuable reference function for those interested in a number of specialties — from sociology and historiography onward — and may, in its own way, become an underground classic in itself.

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A fantasy about fantasy, from Gene Wolfe, whose latest novel is THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH, the fourth and final volume of his series, THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN.

A Solar Labyrinth

BY
GENE WOLFE

Mazes may be more ancient than mankind. Certainly the cavemen constructed them by laying down football-sized stones, and perhaps by other means as well, now lost to us; the hill-forts of neolithic Europe were guarded by tangled dry ditches. Theseus followed a clue — a ball of thread — through the baffling palace of Minos, thus becoming the first in what threatens to be an infinited series of fictional detectives. The Fayre Rosamund dropped her embroidery with her needle thrust through it, but forgot the yarn in her pocket, thus furnishing Queen Eleanor's knights with the clue they required to solve Hampton Court Maze.

Of late, few mazes have been built, and those that have been, have been walled, for the most part, with cheap and unimaginative hedges. Airplanes and helicopters permit rampant marsports to photograph new mazes from above, and the pictures let armchair adventurers solve them with a pencil. Gone, it might seem, are the great days of monsters, maidens and amazement.

But not quite. I have heard that a certain wealthy citizen has not only designed and built a new maze, but has invented a new *kind* of maze, perhaps the first since the end of the Age of Myth. To preserve his privacy I shall call this new Daedalus "Mr. Smith." To frustrate the aerial photographers in their chartered Cessnas, I shall say only that his maze is in the Adirondacks.

On a manicured green lawn, stand — well separated, for the most part — a collection of charming if improbable objects. There are various obelisks; lampposts from Vienna, Paris, and London, as well as New York; a pillar-box, also from London; fountains that plash for a time and then subside; a re-

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tired yawl, canted now upon the reef of grass but with masts still intact; the standing trunk of a dead tree overgrown with roses; many more. The shadows of these objects form the walls of an elaborate and sophisticated maze.

It is, obviously, a maze that changes from hour to hour, and indeed from minute to minute. Not so obviously, it is one that can be solved only at certain times and is insoluble at noon, when the shadows are shortest. It is also, of course, a maze from which the explorer can walk free whenever he chooses.

And yet it is said that most of them — most adults, at least — do not. In the early morning, while the shadows of the hills still veil his lawn, Mr. Smith brings the favored guest to the point that will become the center of the maze. The grass is still fresh with dew, and there is no sound but the chirping of birds. For five minutes or so the two men (or as it may be, the man and the woman) stand and wait. Perhaps they smoke a cigarette. The sun's red disc appears about the mist-shrouded treetops, the fountains jet their crystal columns, the birds fall silent, and the shadowy suites spring into existence, a sketch in the faded black ink of God.

Mr. Smith begins to tread his maze, but he invites his guest to discover paths of his own. The guest does so, amused at first, then more serious. Imperceptibly, the shadows move. New corridors appear; old ones close, sometimes with surprising speed. Soon Mr. Smith's path joins that of his guest (for Mr. Smith knows his maze well), and the two proceed together, the guest leading the way. Mr. Smith speaks of his statue of Diana, a copy of one in the Louvre; the image of Tezcatlipoca, the Toltec sun-god, is authentic, having been excavated at Teotihuacán. As he talks, the shadows shift, seeming almost to writhe like feathered Quetzalcoatl with the slight rolling of the lawn. Mr. Smith steps away, but for a time his path nearly parallels his guest's.

"Do you see that one there?" says the guest. "In another minute or two, when it's shorter, I'll be able to get through there."

Mr. Smith nods and smiles.

The guest waits, confidently now surveying the wonderful pattern of dark green and bright. The shadow he had indicated — that of a Corinthian column, perhaps — indeed diminishes; but as it does another, wheeling with the wheeling sun, falls across the desired path. Most adult guests do not escape until they are rescued by a passing cloud. Some, indeed, refuse such rescue.

Often Mr. Smith invites groups of children to inspect his maze, their visits timed so they can be led to its center. There, inlaid upon a section of crumbling wall that at least *appears* ancient, he points out the frowning figure of the Minotaur, a monster that, as he explains, haunts the shadows. From far away — but not in the direction of the

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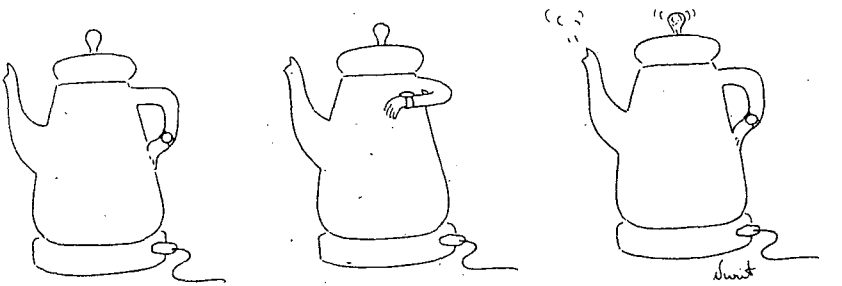
house — the deep bellowing of a bull interrupts him. (Perhaps a straying guest might discover stereo speakers hidden in the boughs of certain trees; perhaps not.) Mr. Smith says he can usually tell in advance which children will enjoy his maze. They are more often boys than girls, he says, but not much more often. They must be young, but not too young. Glasses help. He shows a picture of his latest Ariadne, a dark-haired girl of nine.

Yet he is fair to all the children, giving each the same instructions, the same encouragement. Some reject his maze out of hand, wandering off to examine the tilted crucifix or the blue-dyed water in the towering Torricelli barometer, or to try (always without success) to draw Arthur's sword from its stone. Others persevere longer, threading their way between invisible walls for an hour or more.

But always, as the shadow of the great gnomon creeps towards the sandstone XII set in the lawn, the too-old, too-young, insufficiently serious, and too-serious drift away, leaving only Mr. Smith and one solitary child still playing in the sunshine.



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Burce Sterling's new story concerns a super-agent who is assigned the job of "destabilizing" a primitive dissident cult...

Spook

BY

BRUCE STERLING

For Rudy Rucker

The spook was peeling off from orbit, headed for Washington, D.C., and it felt just great. The spook twisted convulsively in his seat, grinning out the Plexiglas at the cheery red-hot glow of the shuttle's wing edges.

Far below, the unnatural green of genetically altered forests showed the faint scars of old-time roads and fencelines. The spook ran long, narrow, agile fingers through the roots of his short-cropped blue hair. He hadn't made groundfall in ten months. Already the cooped-up feeling of the orbiting zaibatseries was peeling off cold and crisp like a snake's skin.

The shuttle decelerated through Mach 4 with a faint, delicious shiver. The spook twisted in his seat and turned a long slanted green glance past the sleeping plutocrat in the seat beside him and at a woman across the aisle. She had that cool starved zaibatsery look and those hollow veinwebby eyes.... Looked like the gravity was giving her trouble already, she'd spent too much time floating along those lowgray zaibatsery axes of rotation. She'd pay for it when they made groundfall, when she'd have to shuffle all cute from waterbed to waterbed, like helpless prey.... The spook looked down; his hands were making unconscious twitchy clawing motions in his lap. He picked them up and shook the tension out of them. Silly little hands....

The forests of the Maryland Piedmont skinned by like green video. Washington and the DNA recombo labs of Rockville, Maryland, were 1,080 clean ticking seconds away. He couldn't remember when he'd ever had so much fun. Inside his right ear the computer whispered, whispered....

The shuttle albatrossed down on

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the reinforced runway, and airport groundcraft foamed it cool. The spook decamped, clutching his valise.

A chopper was waiting for him from the private security apparat of the Replicon corporation. While it flew him to Replicon's Rockville HQ, he had a drink, shuddering a little at the intuitive impact of the unspoken paradigms of the chopper's interior. The techniques he had learned in the zaibatsery espionage camp oozed up his hindbrain like psychotic flashbacks. Under the impact of gravity, fresh air, and plush upholstery, whole sections of his personality were decaying at once.

He was as sweet and fluid as the heart of a rotting melon. This was fluidity, slick as grease, all right.... Acting on intuition, he opened his valise, took a mechanical comb from a grooming case, and flicked it on with the iridescent nail of his right thumb. Black dye from the comb's vibrating teeth soothed and darkened his blue zaibatsery coif.

He unplugged the tiny jack that was coupled to the auditory nerve of his right ear and unclipped his computer earring. Humming to himself to cover the gaps in its whispering, he opened a flat case clipped inside the valise and restored the minicomp earring to its own padded socket. Inside the case were seven others, little jeweled globes packed with microminiature circuitry, soaked tight with advanced software. He plugged in a new one and hung it from his pale pierced lobe. It whispered to him about his capabilities, in case he had forgotten. He listened with half an ear.

The chopper landed on the Replicon emblem on the rooftop pad of the four-story apparat headquarters. The spook walked to the elevator. He nibbled a bit of skin from the corner of his nail and flicked it into the recessed slot of a biopsy analyzer, then rocked back and forth on his clean new heels, grinning, as he was weighed and scanned and measured by cameras and sonar.

The elevator door slid open. He stepped inside, staring ahead easily, happy as a shadow. It opened again, and he walked down a richly paneled hall and into the office suite of the head of Replicon security.

He gave his credentials to the secretary and stood rocking on his heels while the young man fed them through his desktop computer. The spook blinked his narrow green eyes; the corporate Muzak was soaking into him like a hot bath.

Inside, the security chief was all iron gray hair and tanned wrinkles and big ceramic teeth. The spook took a seat and went limp as wax as the man's vibrations poured over him. The man bubbled over with ambition and corruption like a rusting barrel full of chemical waste. "Welcome to Rockville, Eugene."

"Thank you, sir," the spook said. He sat up straighter, taking on the man's predatory coloration. "It's a pleasure."

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The security chief looked idly into a hooded data screen. "You come highly recommended, Eugene. I have data here on two of your operations for other members of the Synthesis. In the Amsterdam Gill Piracy case you stood up under pressure that would have broken a normal operative."

"I was at the head of my class," said the spook, smiling guilelessly. He didn't remember anything about the Amsterdam case. It had all slicked aside, erased by the Veil. The spook looked placidly at a Japanese kakemono wall hanging.

"We here at Replicon don't often enlist the help of your zaibatsery apparat," the chief said. "But our cartel has been allotted a very special operation by the Synthesis coordinating board. Although you're not a member of the Synthesis, your advanced zaibatsery training is crucial to the mission's success."

The spook smiled blandly, waving the toe of his decorated shoe. Talk of loyalties and ideologies bored him. He cared very little about the Synthesis and its ambitious efforts to unite the planet under one cybernetic-economic web.

Even his feelings about his native zaibatseries were not so much "patriotism" as the sort of warm regard that a worm feels for the core of an apple. He waited for the man to come to the point, knowing that his earring computer could replay the conversation if he missed anything.

The chief toyed with an electronic stylus, leaning back in his chair. "It hasn't been easy for us," he said, "facing the ferment of the postindustrial years, watching a relentless brain-drain into the orbital factories, while overpopulation and pollution wrecked the planet. Now we find we can't even put the pieces back together without help from your orbiters. You can appreciate our position, I hope."

"Perfectly," said the spook. Using his zaibatsery training and the advantages of the Veil, it wasn't hard at all to put on the man's skin and see through his eyes. He didn't like it much, but it wasn't difficult.

"Things are settling down now, since most of the craziest groups have killed themselves off or emigrated into space. The Earth cannot afford the cultural variety you have in your orbiting city-states. Earth must unite its remaining resources under the Synthesis aegis. The conventional wars are over for good and all. What we face now is a war of states of mind."

The chief began doodling absently with the light-pen on a convenient videoscreen. "It's one thing to deal with criminal groups, like the Gill Pirates, and another entirely to confront those, ah, cults and sects who refuse outright to join the Synthesis. Since the population diebacks of the 2000s, large sections of the undeveloped world have gone to seed.... This is especially true of Central America, south of the People's Republic of Mexico.... It's there

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that we face a dissident cult calling itself the Maya Resurgence. We Synthetics are confronting a cultural mindset, what your apparat, Eugene, would call a paradigm, that is directly opposed to everything that unites the Synthesis. If we can stop this group before it can solidify, all will be well. But if their influence continues to spread, it may provoke militancy among the Synthesis. And if we are forced to resort to arms, our own fragile concordance will come apart at the seams. We can't afford to remilitarize, Eugene. We can't afford those suspicions. We need everything we have left to continue to fight ecological disaster. The seas are still rising."

The spook nodded. "You want me to destabilize them. Make their paradigm untenable. Provoke the kind of cognitive dissonance that will make them crumble from within."

"Yes," the chief said. "You are a proven agent. Tear them apart."

The spook said delicately, "If I find it necessary to use interdicted weapons...?"

The chief paled, but set his teeth and said bravely, "Replicon must not be implicated."

It took four days for the small solar-powered Zeppelin to float and whir its way from the dikes of Washington, D.C., to the bloated Gulf of Honduras. The spook rode alone, on a sealed flight. He spent most of the trip in a semiparalyzed state, with the constant whisper of his computer taking the place of conscious thought.

At last the Zep's programming brought it to a grayish waterlogged section of wave-lapped tropical forest near the dock of New Belize. The spook had himself lowered by cable to a firm patch by the churned-up earth of the docks. He waved cheerily to the crew of a three-masted schooner, who had been disturbed from their afternoon siesta by his almost silent arrival.

It was good to see people again. Four days with only his fragmentary self for company had left the spook antsy and hungry for companionship.

It was suffocatingly hot. Wooden crates of bananas were ripening odoriferously on the dock.

New Belize was a sad little town. Its progenitor, Old Belize, was underwater somewhere miles out in the Caribbean, and New Belize had been hastily cobbled together from leftovers. The center of the town was one of the prefabricated geodomes the Synthesis used for headquarters in its corporate concessions. The rest of the town, even the church, clung to the dome's rim like the huts of villagers around a medieval fortress. When and if the seas rose further, the dome would move easily, and the native structures would drown with the rest.

Except for its dogs and flies, the town slept. The spook picked his way through the mud to a bumpy street of corduroyed driftwood. An Amerindi-

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an woman in a filthy shawl watched him from her butcher's stall beside one of the dome's air locks. She brushed flies from a suspended pig's carcass with a palm-leaf fan, and as his eyes locked with hers he felt a paradigmatic flash of her numb misery and ignorance, like stepping on an electric eel. It was weird and intense and new, and her stupefied pain meant absolutely nothing to him, except for its novelty; in fact, he could barely stop himself from leaping over her dirty counter and embracing her. He wanted to slide his hands up under her long cotton blouse and slip his tongue into her wrinkled mouth; he wanted to *get right under her skin* and peel it off like a snake's.... Wow! He shook himself and went in through the air lock.

Inside, it smelled of the Synthesis, compressed and tangy like the air in a diving bell. It was not a large dome, but not a lot of room was needed for the modern management of information. The dome's lower floor was loosely divided into working offices with the usual keyboards, voice decoders, translators, videoscreens, and com channels for satellites and electric mail. The personnel ate and slept upstairs. In this particular station, most of them were Japanese.

The spook mopped sweat from his forehead and asked a secretary in Japanese where he might find Dr. Emilio Flores.

Flores ran a semi-independent health clinic that had slipped suspiciously from Synthetic control. The spook was forced to take a seat in the doctor's waiting room, where he played antique videogames on a battered old display screen.

Flores had an endless clientele of the lame, halt, diseased, and rotting. These Belizeans seemed bewildered by the dome and moved tentatively, as if afraid that they might break the walls or floor. The spook found them intensely interesting. He studied their infirmities — mostly skin diseases, fevers, and parasitic infestations, with a sprinkling of septic wounds and fractures — with an analytic eye. He had never before seen people so sick. He tried to charm them with his expertise on the videogames, but they preferred to murmur to one another in English patois or sit huddled and shivering in the air conditioning.

At last the spook was allowed to see the doctor. Flores was a short, balding Hispanic, wearing a doctor's traditional white business suit. He looked the spook up and down. "Oh," he said. "Now your illness, young man, is one I have seen before. You want to travel. Into the interior."

"Yes," the spook said. "To Tikal."

"Have a seat." They sat down. Behind Flores's chair a nuclear magnetic resonator sat ticking and blinking to itself. "Let me guess," the doctor said, steepling his fingers. "The world seems like a dead end to you, young man. You couldn't make the grade or get the training to migrate to the zaibatseries.

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And you can't bear wasting your life cleaning up a world your ancestors ruined. You dread a life under the thumb of huge cartels and corporations that starve your soul to fill their pockets. You long for a simpler life. A life of the spirit."

"Yes, sir."

"I have the facilities here to change your hair and skin color. I can even arrange the supplies that will give you a decent chance of making it through the jungle. You have the money?"

"Yes, sir. Bank of Zurich." The spook produced an electronic charge card.

Flores fitted the card into a desktop slot, studied the readout, and nodded. "I won't deceive you, young man. Life among the Maya is harsh, especially at first. They will break you and remold you exactly as they want. This is a bitter land. Last century this area fell into the hands of the Predator Saints. Some of the diseases the Predators unleashed are still active here. The Resurgence is heir to Predator fanaticism. They, too, are killers."

The spook shrugged. "I'm not afraid."

"I hate killing," the doctor said. "Still, at least the Maya are honest about it, while the cost-benefit policies of the Synthetics have made the entire local population into prey. The Synthetics will not grant me funds of any kind to prolong the lives of so-called nonsurvival types. So I compromise my honor by accepting the money of Synthetic defectors, and finance my charities with treason. I am a Mexican national, but I learned my profession at a Replicon university."

The spook was surprised. He hadn't known there was still a Mexican "nation." He wondered who owned its government.

The preparations took eight days. The clinic's machines, under Flores's token direction, tinted the spook's skin and irises and reworked the folds around his eyes. He was inoculated against the local and the artificially introduced strains of malaria, yellow jack, typhus, and dengue fever. New strains of bacteria were introduced into his gut to avoid dysentery, and he was given vaccines to prevent allergic reactions to the inevitable bites of ticks, fleas, chiggers, and, worst of all, burrowing screwworms.

When the time came for him to bid farewell to the doctor, the spook was reduced to tears. As he mopped his eyes, he pressed hard against his left cheekbone. There was a clicking sound inside his head and his left sinus cavity began to drain. He carefully but unobtrusively caught the draining fluid in his handkerchief. When he shook hands in farewell, he pressed the wet cloth against the bare skin of the doctor's wrist. He left the handkerchief on Flores's desk.

By the time the spook and his mules had passed the cornfields and entered the jungle, the schizophrenic toxins had taken effect and the doctor's mind

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had shattered like a dropped vase.

The jungle of lowland Guatemala was not a happy place for an orbiter. It was a vast canny jungle of weeds run wild that had known man for a long time. In the twelfth century it had been cauterized for the irrigated cornfields of the original Maya. In the twentieth and twenty-first it had been introduced to the sinister logic of bulldozers, flamethrowers, defoliants and pesticides. Each time, with the death of its oppressors, it had sprung back, nastier and more desperate than before.

The jungle had once been threaded by the trails of loggers and chicleros, seeking mahogany and chicle trees for the international market. Now there were no such trails, because there were no such trees left.

This was not the forest primeval. It was a human artifact, like the genetically altered carbon-dioxide gobblers that stood in industrial ranks across the Synthetic forests of Europe and North America. These trees were the carpetbaggers of an ecological society smashed and in disarray: thorn, mesquite, cabbage palm, winding lianas. They had swallowed whole towns, even, in places, whole oil refineries. Swollen populations of parrots and monkeys, deprived of their natural predators, made nights miserable.

The spook took constant satellite checks of his position and was in no danger of losing his way. He was not having any fun. Disposing of the rogue humanitarian had been too easy to enjoy. His destination was the sinister hacienda of the twentieth century American millionaire, John Augustus Owens, now the headquarters of the Mayan brain trust.

The stuccoed roof-combs of the Tikal pyramids were visible from treetops thirty miles away. The spook recognized the layout of the Resurgent city from satellite photographs. He traveled till dark and spent the night in the decaying church of an overgrown village. In the morning he killed his two mules and set out on foot.

The jungle outside Tikal was full of hunters' trails. A mile outside the city the spook was captured by two sentries armed with obsidian-studded clubs and late-twentieth century automatic rifles.

His guards looked too tall to be actual Mayans. They were probably outside recruits rather than the indigenous Guatemalan Indians who made up the core of the city's population. They spoke only Maya, mixed with distorted Spanish. With the help of his computer, the spook began eagerly sucking in the language, meanwhile complaining plaintively in English. The Veil gave a talent for languages. He had already learned and forgotten over a dozen.

His arms were bound behind him and he was searched for weapons, but not otherwise harmed. His captors marched through a suburban complex of thatched houses, cornfields, and small gardens. Turkeys scratched and

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gobbled underfoot. He was turned over to the theocrats in an elaborate wooden office at the foot of one of the secondary pyramids.

There he was interrogated by a priest, who put aside a headdress and jade lip plug to assume the careful colorlessness of a bureaucrat. The priest's English was excellent and his manner had that ingrained remoteness and casual assumption of total power that only a long acquaintance with industrial-scale power structures could breed. The spook slipped easily into the expected responses. With immediate success, he posed as a defector from the Synthesis, in search of the so-called "human values" that the Synthesis and the zaibatseries had dismissed as obsolete.

He was escorted up the pyramid's limestone stairs and imprisoned near the apex in a small but airy stone cell. His integration into Mayan society, he was told, would come only when he had emptied himself of old falsehoods and was cleansed and reborn. In the meantime he would be taught the language. He was instructed to watch the daily life of the city and to expect a vision.

The cell's barred windows provided a splendid view of Tikal. Ceremonies were carried out every day on the largest temple pyramid; priests climbed like sleepwalkers up its steep stairs, and stone caldrons sent black threads of smoke rising into the pitiless Guatemalan sky. Tikal held almost 50,000 people, a tremendous number for a preindustrial city.

At dawn, water glittered from a hand-dug limestone reservoir east of the city. At dusk the sun set in the jungle beyond a sacred cenote, or sacrificial well. About a hundred yards from the cenote was a small but elaborate stone pyramid, closely guarded by men with rifles, which had been erected over the bombproof shelter of the American millionaire, Owens. When the spook craned his neck and peered through the stone bars, he could see the entrances and exits there of the city's highest-ranking priests.

The cell went to work on him the first day. The combination of his spook training, the Veil, and his computer protected him, but he observed the techniques with interest. During the day he was hit with occasional blasts of subsonics, which bypassed the eye and dug right into the nervous system, provoking disorientation and fear. At night hidden speakers used hypnagogic indoctrination techniques, peaking around 3 A.M. when biorhythmic resistance was lowest. Morning and evenings, priests chanted aloud at the temple's summit, using a mantralike repetition as old as humanity itself. Combined with the mild sensory deprivation of the chamber, its effect was powerful. After two weeks of this treatment, the spook found himself chanting his language lessons aloud with an ease that seemed magical.

In the third week they began drug-

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ging his food. When things began to trail and pattern about two hours after lunch, the spook realized he was not facing the usual vibratory thrill of subsonics but a powerful dose of psilocybin. Psychedelics were not the spook's drugs of choice, but he rode out the dose without much difficulty. The peyote next day was considerably harder — he could taste its bitter alkaloids in his tortillas and black beans — but he ate it all anyway, suspecting that his intake and output were monitored. The day crawled by, with spasms of nausea alternating with elation-states that made him feel his pores were bleeding spines. He peaked sometime after sunset, when the city gathered by torchlight to watch two young women in white robes plummet fearlessly from a stone catafalque into the cold green depths of the sacred well. He could almost taste the chill green limestone water in his own mouth as the drugged girls quietly drowned.

In the fourth and fifth weeks his diet of native psychedelics was cut back. He was acculturated by being escorted around the city by two young priestesses of his own apparent age. They rounded out the subliminal language lessons and began to introduce him to the Resurgence's carefully crafted theology. By now a normal man would have been sufficiently pulverized to cling to them like a child. It had been a severe ordeal even for the spook, and he sometimes had to struggle against the urge to rip both priestesses to pieces like a pair of tangerines.

Halfway through his second month he was put to work on probation in the cornfields, and allowed to sleep in a hammock in a thatched house. Two other recruits shared the hut, where they struggled to reintegrate their shattered psyches along approved cultural lines. The spook didn't like being cooped up with them; they were so broken up that there was nothing left for him to pick up on.

He was tempted to creep out at night, ambush a couple of priests, and break them up, just to get a healthy flow of disintegrative paranoia going, but he bided his time. It was a tough assignment. The power elite's consumption of drugs had accustomed them to psychotomimetic states, and if he used his implanted schizophrenic weaponry prematurely he might actually reinforce the local paradigm. Instead he began to plan an assault on the millionaire's bunker. Presumably, most of the arsenal of the Predator Saint was still intact: cultured plague germs, chemical agents, possibly even a privately owned warhead or two. The more he thought about it, the more tempted he was to simply murder the entire colony. It would save him a lot of grief.

On the night of the next full moon he was allowed to attend a sacrifice. The rainy season was due, and it was necessary to coax the rain gods with the death of four children. The children were drugged with mushrooms

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and adorned with flint and jade and thickly embroidered robes. Pepper was blown into their eyes to evoke the rain-tears of sympathetic magic, and they were escorted to the edge of the catafalque. Drums and flutes and a chanted litany combined with the moonlight and torchlight to throw an intensely hypnotic ambience over the worshippers. The air reeked of copal incense, and to the spook's empathic senses it seemed as thick as cheese. He let himself soak into the crowd, and it felt wonderful. It was the first time he'd had any fun in ages.

A high-ranking priestess weighted down with armlets and a towering feathered headdress paced slowly along the front lines of the crowd, distributing ladles of fermented balche from a jug. The spook shuffled forward for his share.

There was something very odd about the priestess. At first he thought she was just blasted on psychedelics, but her eyes were clear. She held out the ladle for him to sip, and when his fingers touched hers, she looked into his face and screamed.

Suddenly he knew what was wrong. "Eugenia!" he gasped. She was another spook.

She went for him. There was nothing elegant about the hand-to-hand combat techniques of spooks. The martial arts, with their emphasis on calmness and control, didn't work for operatives only partly conscious to begin with. Instead, ingrained conditioning simply stripped them down into screaming, clawing, adrenalin-crazed maniacs, impervious to pain.

The spook felt murderous hysteria rising up within him. To stand and fight was certain death; his only hope was to escape into the crowd. But as he fended off the woman's rush, strong hands were already seizing him. Snarling he broke free, spinning toward the lip of the broad edge of the sacred well, then turned, looked: torches, ugly fear, a crazed face, the plumes of warriors nearing, the clack of automatic rifles, no time for a rational decision. Pure intuition, then. He turned and threw himself headfirst into the wide, dank, empty gloom of the sacred well.

The water was a hard shock. He floated on his back rubbing the sting of impact from his face. The water was thready with filaments of algae. A fish nibbled his bare leg beneath his cotton skirt. He knew all too well what it ate. He looked at the cenote walls. No hope there — they were as smooth as glass, as smooth as if they had been fused with lasers, or fireball-blasted.

Time passed. A white form came plummeting downward, belly-flopping into the water with a lethal smack. They were sacrificing the children.

Something grabbed his foot and pulled him under.

Water filled his nose. He was too busy choking to fight his way free. He was pulled down into the blackness.

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Water seared his lungs and he passed out.

He awoke in a straitjacket and looked up at a ceiling of creamy antiseptic white. He was in a hospital bed. He moved his head on the pillow and realized that his scalp had been shaved.

To his left an antique monitor registered his pulse and breathing. He felt awful. He waited for his computer to whisper something, and realized that it was gone. Rather than feeling its loss, however, he felt, somehow, repulsively *whole*. His brain felt like an overstuffed stomach.

From his right he heard faint, harsh breathing. He twisted his head to look. Sprawled on a waterbed was a withered, naked old man, cyborged into a medusa complex of life-support machinery. A few locks of colorless hair clung to the old man's age-spotted scalp, and his sunken, sharp-nosed face had the look of long-forgotten cruelty.... An EEG registered a few flickers of comatose delta waves from the hindbrain. It was John Augustus Owens.

The sound of sandals on stone. It was the female spook. "Welcome to the Hacienda Maya, Eugene."

He stirred feebly in his straitjacket, trying to pick up her vibrations. It was like trying to swim in air. With growing panic, he realized that his paradigmatic empathy was gone. "What in hell..."

"You're whole again, Eugene. It feels strange, doesn't it? After all those years of being a junkyard of other people's feelings? Can you remember your real name yet? That's an important first step. Try."

"You're a traitor." His head weighed ten tons. He sank back into the pillow, feeling too stupid even to regret his indiscretion. Tattered remnants of his spook training said he ought to flatter her....

"My real name," she said precisely, "was Anatolya Zhukova, and I was sentenced to corrective education by the Brezhnevograd People's Zaibatsery.... You were a dissident or so-called criminal of some kind also, before the Veil robbed you of your personality. Most of our top people here are from orbit, Eugene. We're not the stupid Terran cultists you were led to believe. Who hired you, anyway? Yamato Corporation? Fleisher S.A.?"

"Don't waste your time."

She smiled. "You'll come around. You're human now, and the Resurgence is humanity's brightest hope. Look."

She held up a glass flask. Inside it, something like a threaded cloudly film floated slowly in a yellowish plasma. It seemed to squirm. "We took this out of your head, Eugene."

He gasped. "The Veil."

"Yes, the Veil. It's been riding on the top of your cortex for God knows how long now, breaking you up, keeping you fluid. Robbing you of your

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personality. You were nothing better than a psychopath in harness."

He closed his eyes, stunned. She said, "We understand Veil technology here, Eugene. We use it ourselves, sometimes, on sacrificial victims. They can emerge from the well, touched by the Gods. Troublemakers turned divinely into saints. It fits in well with the old Mayan traditions of trepanation; a triumph of social engineering, really. They're very competent here. They managed to capture me without knowing anything about the spook apparat but rumors."

"You tried to take them out?"

"Yes. They caught me alive and won me over. And even without the Veil I have enough perception left to tell a spook when I see one." Again, she smiled. "I was faking mania when I attacked you. I only knew you had to be stopped at any cost."

"I could have ripped you apart."

"Then, yes. But now you've lost your maniac phase, and we've killed your implanted weapons. Cloned bacteria producing schizophrenic toxins in your sinuses. Altered sweat glands oozing emotional hormones. Nasty! But you're safe now. You're nothing more or less than a normal human being."

He consulted his interior state. His brain felt like a dinosaur's. "Do people really feel like this?"

She touched his cheek. "You haven't begun to feel. Wait until you've lived with us a while, seen the plans we've made, in the finest traditions of the Predator Saints...." She looked reverently at the machine-pumped corpse across the room. "Overpopulation, Eugene — that's what ruined us. The Saints took the moral effort of genocide upon themselves. Now the Resurgents have taken up the challenge of building a stable society — without the dehumanizing technology that has always, inevitably, been turned against us. The Mayans had the right idea — a civilization of social stability, ecstatic communion with the Godhead, and a firm appreciation of the cheapness of human life. They simply didn't go far enough. They didn't kill enough people to keep their population in check. With a few small changes in the Mayan theology we have brought the whole system into balance. It's a balance that will outlast the Synthesis by centuries."

"You think primitives armed with stone knives can triumph over the industrialized world?"

She looked at him pityingly. "Don't be naïve. Industry really belongs in space, where there's room and raw materials, not in a biosphere. Already the zaibatseries are years ahead of Earth in every major field. The Earth's industrial cartels are so drained of energy and resources trying to clean up the mess they inherited that they can't even handle their own industrial espionage. And the Resurgent elite is armed to the teeth with the weaponry, and the spiritual inheritence, of the

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Predator Saints. John Augustus Owens dug the Cenote of Tikal with a low-yield neutron bomb. And we own stores of twentieth century binary nerve gas that we could smuggle, if we wanted, into Washington, or Kyoto, or Kiev.... No, as long as the elite exists, the Synthetics can't dare to attack us head-on — and we intend to go on protecting this society until its rivals are driven into space, where they belong. And now you and I, together, can avert the threat of paradigmatic attack."

"There'll be others," he said.

"We've co-opted every attack made upon us. People want to live real lives, Eugene — to feel and breathe and love and be of simple human worth. They want to be something more than flies in a cybernetic web. They want something realer than empty pleasures in the luxury of a zaibatsu can-world. Listen, Eugene. I'm the only person who has ever put on the spook's Veil and then returned to humanity, to a thinking, feeling, genuine life. We can understand each other."

The spook considered this. It was frightening and bizarre to be rationally thinking on his own, without a computer helping to manage his stream of consciousness. He hadn't realized how stiff and painful thinking was. The weight of consciousness had crushed the intuitive powers that the Veil had once set free. He said incredulously, "You think we could *understand* each other? By ourselves?"

"Yes!" she said. "You don't know how much I've needed it!"

The spook twitched in his straightjacket. There was a roaring in his head. Half-smothered segments of his mind were flaming, like blown coals, back into blazing life. "Wait!" he shouted. "Wait!" He had remembered his name and, with it, what he was.

Outside Replicon's Washington headquarters, snow was sifting over the altered evergreens. The head of security leaned back in his chair, fiddling with his light-pen. "You've changed, Eugene."

The spook shrugged. "You mean the skin? The zaibatsery apparat can deal with that. I'm dead tired of this bodyform, anyway."

"No, it's something else."

"Of course. I was robbed of the Veil." He smile flatly. "To continue. Once the traitress and I had become lovers, I was able to discover the location and guard codes of the nerve gas armaments. Immediately thereafter I faked an emergency, and released the chemical agents within the sealed bunker. They had all sought safety there, so their own ventilation system destroyed all but two of them. Those two I hunted down and shot later the same night. Whether the cyborg Owens 'died' or not is a matter of definition."

"You won the woman's trust?"

"No. That would have taken too long. I simply tortured her until she

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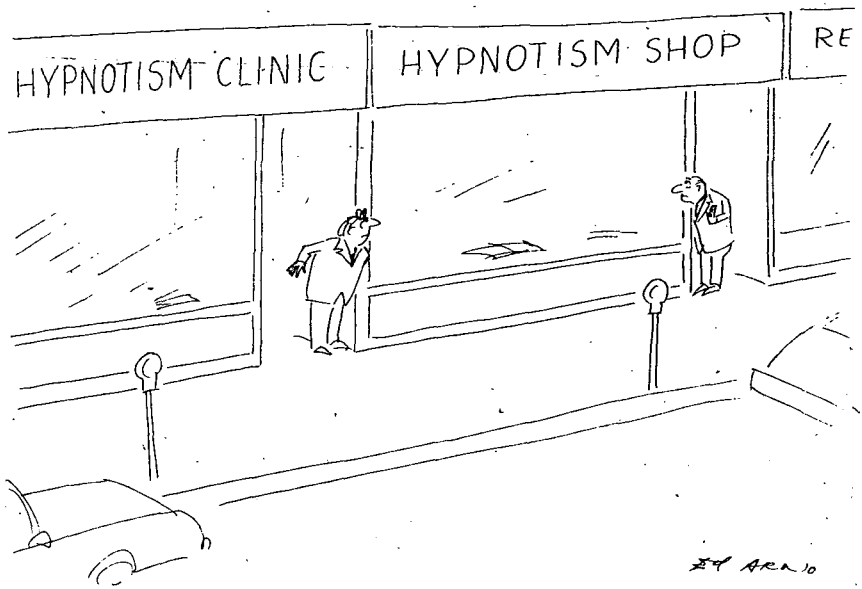
broke." Again, he smiled. "Now the Synthesis can move in and dominate the Mayan population, as you would any other preindustrial culture. A few transistor radios will knock the whole flimsy structure over like a deck of cards."

"You have our thanks," said the chief. "And my personal congratulations."

"Save it," said the spook. "Once I've faded back into the shadows under the Veil, I'll forget all this anyway. I'll forget that my name is Simpson. I'll forget that I am the mass murderer responsible for the explosion of the Leyland Zaibetsery and the death of 8,000 orbiters. By any standards I am a deadly hazard to society who fully deserves to be psychically destroyed." He fixed the man with a cold, controlled, and feral grin. "And I face my own destruction happily. Because now I've seen life from both sides of the Veil. Because now I know for sure what I've always suspected. Being human just isn't enough fun."



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Walter Satterthwait is 35, lives in Clearwater, Florida and has sold two novels, the most recent, THE AEGEAN AFFAIR, to Dell. His first story for F&SF is a brisk and entertaining contemporary variation on a classic fantasy theme.

Territorial Imperative

BY

WALTER SATTERTHWAIT

It's the movies that did it, of course. Spread all this garbage around. The garlic and the crucifixes and the glowing red eyes. The coffins stuffed with dirt. The wooden stakes. The wooden stakes, that was always one of my favorites. Stick a wooden stake in *my* heart, kiddo, and you'll be pulling splinters out of your nose for the next three months.

Don't get me wrong, now. Personally, I like those movies. But mostly for the laughs. That *Nosferatu*, the German flick, the first one? That Max Schrenck, eight feet tall, all bug-eyed and snaky-toothed, fingernails down to his ankles, ankles up to his neck. I mean, can you picture this guy *mingling*? Can you picture him sipping a Campari at *Elaine's*? If he were hanging out at your place for an evening, can you see yourself sidling up and offering him a couple canapés?

It's funny, though, now I think of it. About *Nosferatu*, I mean. If I hadn't gone to see it again that night, back in the sixties, I might never have phased into that creep who was causing all those murders, and Trina, probbably, would still be among the living.

I tell you that one? About the Vampire Killer?

In 1966, this was. Usually I'm not all that good on dates, but '66 was my centennial; it had been exactly a hundred years since Marta converted me. She sent me a card, I remember, that May.

Anyway, I was working as a bartender at the Plaza Oyster Bar, and Trina, Trina Fallon, was the woman I was seeing at the time. Trina was a writer, a free-lancer. She was thirty-two years old, short, slim, brown-haired, pageboyed, a semi-neurotic

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type, one of those women forever in motion, touching their hair, tugging at the hem of their skirts, crossing and uncrossing their legs. She had a lot of purple in her aura, and normally I avoid that kind.

But Trina. Well, in a way she reminded me of Lily Langtry. (Put a few years under your belt and you start noticing how everyone you meet reminds you of someone you met before.) She wasn't as beautiful as Lily, didn't have the same perfect features, the same perfect skin — poreless and peerless, Oscar called it — but what she had, what her eyes had, was the same kind of bright cunning sparkle I used to see in Lily's. You looked into those eyes and they looked right back at you, amused and bold and waiting for your next move.

We had been seeing each other, Trina and I, for maybe two months when I learned about the Vampire Killer. How I learned was, I was lying on Trina's bed in a pleasantly tired, balmy afterwards mood. Trina was lying beside me, left leg drawn up, right leg balanced on her left knee, the right foot making back-and-forth movements, slow and easy, waltz time. Trina said, "Did you read in the papers today? About that woman they found?"

Yawning, I looked over at her. "Woman?"

"In the alley." She watched her foot.

"Alley." I yawned again.

"Spooky," Trina said.

"Spooky?"

"Very spooky. You didn't read it?" I shook my head no.

"It wasn't far from your place," Trina said.

"What wasn't?"

"Where they found her. The alley."

"Dead, was she?" It was a standard New York equation: woman plus alley equals dead.

Trina nodded. Her foot was moving now in slow clockwise circles. "The spooky part was the blood."

Over the years I've gotten very good at hiding my reactions. "What," I said in the same tired voice, "was spooky about the blood?"

"There wasn't any."

"Wasn't any?"

"Inside her. She'd been drained, apparently." She looked at me, frowning. "Isn't that weird?"

If it were true, it was a lot worse than weird. But I only said, as though I didn't believe her, "Oh, come on."

"It was in the *Post*," she said, looking back at her foot, which began to move counterclockwise. "An old man found her and called the cops. Told them he thought she was hurt or something, but as soon as he saw her face — white as a pillowcase, he said — he knew she was dead."

"Dead, maybe, but not drained."

"Desanguination," she said. "That's the word the autopsy report used." She cocked her head to one side and repeated it: "Desanguination. That's a

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very final-sounding sort of word, don't you think?"

"She bled to death, is all."

She looked at me. "No. That's what I mean about it being spooky. There wasn't any blood in the alley. Anywhere. And there weren't any wounds on her body."

"That's impossible," I said, knowing very well, of course, that it wasn't.

Trina grabbed the toes of her right foot in her hand and straightened her leg, making a narrow inverted *V* pointing toward the ceiling. "It makes you think," she said.

"Makes you think what?"

"The obvious." Slowly, still holding onto her foot, she began to rotate her leg. "You know. Vampires."

"Jesus," I said. "The obvious?"

"A better explanation?"

"Sure," I said. "So she was drained. But not in the alley. Someone, some mad scientist, let's say. I don't know. A loon, obviously, but with access to the right equipment. He kidnaps her, takes her off somewhere. He drains her there, then later he dumps her in the alley."

"Nope," Trina said. The leg slowly swung. "She was seen less than half an hour before the old man found her. Seen alive." She lowered her right leg, raised her left, clutched her left toes, began to rotate that leg.

"A truck," I said. "He's got the equipment inside, the pump or whatever. He grabs her, pulls her into the truck, drains her, then throws her in the alley."

"A mad scientist with a pump truck," Trina said. "I like it."

"It's a better explanation than yours."

"I don't think so," she said. Neither did I. "Maybe I'll talk to the coroner's office tomorrow," she said.

"Now that sounds like fun."

"I know one of the assistants there. Larry Bernstein, from City College. The report says no wounds, but there must have been some sort of puncture marks."

"Two little holes in the neck?"

She began to rotate her leg in the opposite direction. "Right."

"And if there weren't?"

Her leg still slowly revolving, she shrugged. "Maybe vampires can take the blood without leaving holes."

And there it was. She didn't know it, naturally, but all by herself she'd tumbled to one of the most important secrets of the People. Like I told you before, the same enzyme that acts as an anticoagulant, the enzyme that stops this stuff called fibrin from forming and blocking the wound, it also seals the puncture afterward and heals it, even if the body itself, at that point, is as dead as a stone.

But all I said was, "Jesus."

"There might be a story in it," Trina said.

I should tell you something about Trina which'll maybe explain why she was taking this vampire idea so calmly. The kind of stuff she wrote, it was mainly articles about the occult and

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what they call now the paranormal. She always took what she said was the objective approach, which meant that she never really admitted to herself how badly she wanted to be a believer, and that she always ended each piece with a question mark.

But I have to confess, she'd been pretty successful. She'd sold articles about seances and table rappings and werewolves and witches. She'd never written about vampires.

"If you say so," I said.

I left Trina's at two o'clock that morning, took a cab down to the Village, stopped for a bite near Sheridan Square, picked up a newspaper, read it as I walked home, and reached my apartment on Perry Street by 3:30. The telephone was ringing, and I knew it was one of the others.

"Art?" It was Howard.

"Yeah," I said.

"*Shit*, man. What the hell is *happening* down there?"

"I don't know," I told him. "I just heard about it a little while ago. You talk to the rest?"

"Charlie and Ruth. Rhoda's not in yet. Jesus Christ, man."

I said, "It's got to be an outsider. A rogue."

"Shit, yes, it's an outsider. I know that, man. But from where? Where'd this mother come from? I talked to Peter tonight, in Paris, and he says there hasn't been nothing like this over there. *Nowhere* in Europe."

"I thought Peter was in Amsterdam."

"He switched with Marc. Hey, man, we got us a friggin' psycho on our hands."

"I know that, Howard. That girl was killed four blocks from my apartment."

"So where the hell this mother *come* from?"

"South America?" I said. "Is that a possibility?"

Howard considered that for a moment. "Maybe," he said. "Yeah, maybe. You thinking Brazil?"

"We don't have anyone there, do we?"

"Maybe I should call Lars?"

"Lars isn't in Caracas anymore," I told him.

"Say *what?* He back up at that dumb village again?"

"Yeah. But I think Maria's still there. And Tony."

"Right, I'll call Maria. But what if she can't help us?"

"Then all we can do is hope that he's just passing through."

I guess I should explain how we worked New York. There were five of us, and we each had our own sector. Mine was everything south of 14th Street. Ruth's was midtown, up to 59th. Charlie had everything east of Central Park, and Rhoda had everything west, both up to 110th Street. Howard had Harlem.

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Now you'd probably think that those were fairly large chunks of territory for one Person to cover. But you've got to remember that at night every sector had its dead areas — like Wall Street, in mine — and that the five of us did have a few limitations.

Sex, for one. Strictly speaking, of course, there's no reason why a male Person can't live perfectly okay on a diet of male citizen. Hans does it all the time, over in Munich. But then Hans is gay. Given a choice, and usually you are, you're going to feed from the gender that turns you on. So right away, there goes half the food in your sector straight down the drain.

Then there's blood type. We don't have any blood of our own, of course — if we did, we wouldn't need yours — but we can feed only off citizens with a blood type identical to what our's used to be. Charlie — he's a doctor, he was court physician to Louis XIV and he's kept up — he could give you all the technical reasons (antibodies, agglutination, etc.), but what they amount to is this: your body rejects the stuff.

It won't kill you — only fire or starvation or another Person can do that — but it'll make you sick as a dog. So when you see from the aura that the citizen has the wrong blood type, you move on.

Next there's pollution. Additives in the bloodstream. Here again, when you spot it in the aura, you walk. Stimulants like cocaine and the amphetamines, even caffeine, they show up in the orange band as thin flames flaring out from the red, flickering and snapping. Depressants like alcohol, phenobarb, Quaaludes, all the tranquilizers, they affect both the blue band and the red: they dull the blue, blurring it, and they make the red band pulse with an irregular, skipping kind of glow. Hallucinogens brighten the entire spectrum, and send sparks streaking out through all the bands, like tiny white shooting stars.

All of them, all these poisons, put our nervous system into a tailspin. And, as you can imagine, pollution is a serious problem in a city like New York. It was one of the reasons I left the city and moved out here: every night I spent more and more time looking for a citizen whose blood wasn't laced with *something*.

Anyway, these were a few of the limitations that restricted us. And there were others — police, nosy insomniacs, yipping housepets, doormen. So you can see why we needed a pretty large area to roam in.

For the next few days, I did a lot of phasing in as I strolled through my sector, trying to locate this outsider. But since I didn't get off work until three or four in the morning, and since all that phasing in was sapping my prana amd forcing me to feed twice a night, instead of once, I wasn't really on the streets that much.

Howard called me on Wednesday,

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and told me that Maria hadn't come up with anything. But she was going to call some People she knew in La Paz and Buenos Aires.

Thursday was my night off from the bar. I would've spent it looking for the outsider, but I'd promised Trina, earlier, that I'd come over for dinner. Also, I wanted to find out if she'd learned anything.

That was the first thing I asked her after we kissed hello: "So how goes the hunt for the vampire?"

"Interesting," she said. "Come on in. Do you want some grape juice with dinner?" She knew I didn't drink alcohol; she didn't either.

"Sure," I told her.

"Take a seat, big boy." That was supposed to be a joke, on account of my height.

I sat down at the kitchen table while she poured the juice, standing beside me. "I tried calling you last night," she said.

"I was at work last night."

"No, stupid. Afterward." She put the bottle on the table. "Around 5:30 this morning. I woke up and couldn't get back to sleep."

"I was out for a walk."

She narrowed her eye. "You sure you haven't got some chippy on the side?"

"You're my only chippy," I said. "Actually, I was out sucking blood." Which was, of course, the truth.

She laughed. "Wait'll I tell you. Do you know what Bernstein said?"

"What?"

"Hold on. Let me get the peppers out of the oven."

The meal was bean sprout salad, rice, and green peppers stuffed with kasha and pine nuts. Trina was what used to be called, before they began to multiply, a health nut. Yoga and calisthenics every day, no smoking or drinking, no meat. She would've made a good feed — her aura was clean and clear, and she was an O, like I was — but I never mix friendship and food.

Talking about food — the citizens' idea of food, that is. Some citizens believe we can't eat it. We can, of course. The problem is, we can't digest it. It just lies there at the bottom of our bellies, like a heap of gravel, until we get rid of it with a quick upchuck. So for the most part, except in unavoidable social situations, we don't bother with it.

"So tell me," I said as Trina picked up knife and fork, "did you find your puncture marks?"

"No," Trina said casually, cutting into a pepper, "but I did find out that the Lundstrum woman wasn't the first victim."

I nearly choked on a pine nut. "What?"

She smiled a feline smile. "I thought you'd like that."

"There were others?"

She nodded. "At least one. The police pulled her out of the East River two days before the Lundstrum murder. A floater. That's the technical term."

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"But how do they know it's the same thing?"

"She had no blood in her body. There were marks on her, but they were all made after she went into the water." She swallowed a bite of pepper. "The fish," she explained.

"How long had she been there? Does this Bernstein of yours know when she died?"

"He estimates four or five days in the water. She was probably killed about a week before the Lundstrum woman. The coroner's office is keeping everything hush-hush, though. For obvious reasons."

"This other woman. Do they know who she is?"

"Yeah," she said out of the corner of a mouthful of rice. "She was Chinese. Lived down on Pell Street somewhere."

The bastard had hit twice now in my sector.

When I got home, I called the others, told them what I'd learned from Trina, and arranged a meeting of us all at Rhoda's for early Friday night.

The next day, I called the Plaza and said I was too sick to come to work. I arrived at Rhoda's a little after eight.

Rhoda answered the door, gave me a peck on the cheek, and said, "Howard called. He'll be a tad late. He got shot, it seems."

I couldn't help smiling as I entered the foyer. "That's the second time this month."

"He works a difficult sector, dear. And if I were you, I shouldn't let him know how amusing you find it. He was quite upset about another sport coat being ruined. One hole in the back and another through the lapel. He'd only just bought it."

"I won't mention it," I promised.

"We *do* have some news, however."

Charlie and Ruth were sitting on the sofa. Both of them nodded as I entered. Both seemed grim.

Rhoda said, "Perhaps you'd better tell him, Charlie." She sat on the love seat.

I sat down in the leather chair and Charlie said, "Maria called me earlier. She talked to Hector Ortega in Buenos Aires last Monday, after Howard phoned her. Do you know Ortega? Nor do I. No matter. Evidently, you were right about Brazil. Remember the Caro sisters?"

I thought for a moment.

"Lisbon," Ruth reminded me.

"Oh, yeah. They disappeared, what, about forty years ago."

"Exactly," said Charlie. "And good riddance to bad rubbish, we all thought. But apparently they simply changed their names and moved to Brazil. When Maria called, Ortega remembered reading something a few weeks ago about two women — "witches," the newspapers called them — who'd been burned to death in a small village outside Ponto Grossa. The papers said that a third witch, a man named Fran-

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cisco who lived with them, had escaped."

"How do we know these two were the Caro sisters?"

"Ortega flew up there," Charlie said. "He understood, of course, how important this was. From the descriptions he obtained, it appears certain they were, indeed, the Caro sisters."

"And what about this guy?" I asked. "The one who got away."

"I'm afraid," Rhoda said, "that you're not going to enjoy this."

"According to the villagers," Charlie said, "the man was a giant, six and a half feet tall, well over two hundred and forty pounds."

"But he can't be," I said, and then realized that he could. "Unless—"

"Yeah, right," said Ruth. "Unless both the sisters converted him at the same time."

I looked at Charlie. "Is that possible?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"Oh, Christ."

"Yeah," agreed Ruth.

The doorbell rang then, and it was Howard. We filled him in on the Caro sisters and the missing giant.

"Shit," he said when we were done. "So what's the mother doing in New York? How come he didn't go to Rio or some other place down there?"

Charlie shrugged. "Perhaps he thought he was still being sought in Brazil. New York would've seemed an ideal stalking ground to him, considering its population density. Remember, the Caro sisters have been out of touch for forty years. He'd know nothing of us, nothing of our division of the city."

"Yeah," said Howard, "but why's he blowing these broads away? Even if he weighed *three* hundred pounds he wouldn't have to waste them."

Ruth said, "Charlie thinks it's revenge."

Charlie nodded. "It's the only explanation that makes sense. He's determined to destroy citizens because they killed his convertors, the Caro sisters."

Rhoda turned to me. "Well, dear, he's killed two women in your sector. What exactly is your proposal?"

I told them. We divided my sector into five subsectors, and each of us took one. The four of them agreed to make their first feed uptown, in their own sectors, before coming down to mine; the prana drain from phasing in would require them to feed again, in my sector, but that couldn't be helped.

As we were leaving the apartment to get cabs downtown, Rhoda said to me, "You know, dear, we're very happy to help you with this. But it *is* your sector, and once we locate this madman ... well, you do understand the problem?"

Yeah," I said. "You can't do anything about him until I go up against him first, and maybe get myself killed."

"Tradition, dear. I'm really very sorry." She seemed genuinely concerned. I looked at the others. They all seemed concerned.

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"Well," I said, "let's get this show on the road."

This killing business. Our objections to it, like I mentioned once before, they're more practical than moral. Killing creates publicity, increases police patrols; makes citizens so edgy that a lot of them can't sleep without popping some kind of pill, polluting themselves; it turns the hunt, which is never easy, into a very difficult proposition.

And the thing is, killing a citizen by complete desanguination is unnecessary in the first place. A pint a night is all we need to maintain our prana level. In the second place, it's damn unpleasant. Your average citizen holds about five quarts. That's a shade more, in volume, than a case of Schlitz. Scarfing down all of it would be like eating one Thanksgiving dinner on top of another, and then putting away a banana split.

Oh, we can do it. After all, that's how we make conversions. But it leaves us logy and limp and pretty much useless for a day or two, despite the big increase in prana.

That's why most of the People don't weigh more than 140 pounds, 150, tops: obviously, we've all been converted; most conversions are heterosexual; and you can't convert someone whose blood weight is much more than what yours used to be, when you had it.

But this Brazilian bozo wasn't converting these women; he wasn't backfeeding them, returning a dollop of their blood and a portion of his prana. He was simply killing them. And we had to stop him. Or, to put it more accurately, since he was working in my sector, *I* had to stop him.

At 4:30 that Saturday morning, we all met at the Sheridan Square subway station. No one had turned up anything. We agreed to meet there again at the same time tomorrow morning. If this guy kept to schedule, he'd be hunting on Saturday or Sunday night.

When I returned to my apartment, the phone was ringing. Surprised, I picked it up.

Trina said, "Where've you *been?*"

"What do you mean?" I said. Stalling.

"God, Art. I stopped in at the Plaza earlier, to say hello, and they told me you were sick. I called and called, then I went down to your apartment and knocked on the door like an idiot for half an hour — I was afraid you'd *died* or something. I've been calling ever since I got home. So you *tell* me, what the hell is going on?"

"I'm sorry, Trina. I must've been out cold when you came by. The doctor gave me these pills, I think they were designed for horses."

"You're trying to tell me you were *there?*" Very dubious. "The whole *time?*"

"Trina, I swear to you, I just woke up."

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"Alone?"

"Of course alone."

"Well, what am I supposed to think? You're not at work, you're not at home—"

"I *was* at home."

"How do I know that? How do I know you weren't shacking up with some bimbo?"

That purple in the aura.

"Trina," I said. "You want a note from the doctor?"

"Oh, well, *shit*." She was silent for a moment. Then she said, "Well. How do you feel now? I mean, are you better?"

"Much better."

"I hope so. You haven't forgotten that you're taking me out tonight?"

I had. "Well, Trina...."

"Now dammit, Art, you *promised*."

"Trina—"

"I will not get angry," she said slowly. "I will be an adult. If you're sick, you're sick. I can accept that. But I want to see you. So what I'll do, I'll come down there and make you some chicken soup. I'l tuck you in. Isn't that what we selfless, understanding women are supposed to do?"

"No, no," I told her. If I took her out, I could always plead, around eleven o'clock, that I was feeling sick again, and had to go back, alone, to my apartment. "I'm feeling a lot better. We'll go out."

"Don't do me any favors or anything."

"Trina, I *want* to go out with you."

"Well," she said. "All right, then. But I'll come down there. There's a movie playing in the Village that I want to see."

"What movie?"

"*Nosferatu*."

Jesus. On top of everything else, I had to sit through *Nosferatu* again.

But like I said, it was a lucky thing I did go to the Bleecker Street Cinema that night.

In a movie theater, I like to sit way up toward the screen, slumped down on the curve of my spine with my head against the seatback, my knees braced against the seat in front. Trina was sitting beside me, eating unsalted, unbuttered popcorn.

I was actually enjoying the film. I'd seen it three or four times — saw the premiere in Germany — but it still gave me a chuckle. But just at the point where you get your first good glom of old Max, just where he shuffles onscreen wearing fifty pounds of fangs, just then I heard, from far behind me, toward the rear of the theater, someone laugh.

Now our hearing is pretty damn good. And in that laugh I didn't hear any real amusement. I didn't hear the nervousness that citizens sometimes use laughter to hide. What I heard was easy scorn and cold, cruel contempt.

None of the others, Charlie and the rest, would be taking time out to see a movie, especially *Nosferatu*. And so

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the Person sitting back there, said the odds, was the boy we were after.

I waited a few minutes before I looked back. To turn around, bringing my head up above the level of the seatback, could be dangerous — if he were phasing in at that moment, he'd spot me.

But finally I rose slightly in my seat, swiveled my head, glanced quickly around the auditorium.

What you'd have seen, beneath the hazy rectangular beam from the projector, would be rows of blurry silhouettes, heads and shoulders against a dim field of gray. What I saw, as I phased in, was an amphitheater of luminous multicolored auras, all glowing brilliant in the darkness, all shimmering and glimmering the way they do, dazzling and radiant. In every seat, for row after row, sat a rainbow aflame.

In every seat but one. There I could see only the black outline of a head, the black outline of broad, heavy shoulders. A single burned-out bulb in an enormous electrical display. It was him.

The People don't give off auras.

I turned back and hunkered down in my seat. I tuned my hearing up to the maximum: if he'd seen me, he might try to leave. He didn't.

Ignoring the movie, I waited, listened, waited. At last *Nosferatu* was over. The second feature was *Frankenstein*, the original, and Trina wanted to see that, too. But when I turned to look over my shoulder, and phased in, I saw the bulky black shape moving along a row of auras, blocking them out one after another, blink, blink, as it passed before them.

"Jesus!" I said to Trina. "I just remembered! I forgot to turn off the gas! On the oven. Jesus!"

The black shape was almost at the entrance to the theater.

I stood up and Trina grabbed my hand. "*Art*," she hissed, and her purple flared, her red throbbed.

"Meet me at the Figaro after the movie."

"Godammit, Art!" She wasn't hissing anymore, and someone behind us shouted to shut up. Someone else shouted to sit down.

I pulled free of Trina and ran up the aisle. I'd straighten things out with her later.

When I stepped out onto the street, he was off to the left, walking down Bleecker. I didn't need to phase in. He was huge, broad as a bulldozer, and he towered over everyone else on the street.

I tracked him for two hours, staying about fifty yards in back, occasionally altering the rhythm of my stride: if he was listening, he wouldn't realize that the same person was behind him.

He wasn't listening. He was stalking. Slowly, carefully, methodically, he would turn down one of the small streets off Bleecker, walk south on its left side, to Houston Street, then cross

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over to the other side and walk back to Bleecker. He covered the area south of Bleecker as far west as Sixth Avenue, then started on the north, using 8th Street as a boundary now.

Once or twice it was close. Whenever he turned at end of a street and started coming back up towards me, on the far side, I'd duck behind a cluster of people, hide myself behind their auras. Fortunately, even in 1966, maybe especially in 1966, Village citizens were intimate with insane behavior.

He strode through the Village, and through the East Village, and I followed him. Then he reversed directions, came back east on 8th Street, trekked across Sixth Avenue, and headed toward Seventh, swimming into the crowd. It was here that I lost him.

I stood on the corner of 8th Street and Seventh Avenue, turning in anxious circles, looking for the wink in an aura, in any of the hundreds of auras surrounding me, that would mean he'd blocked it. Nothing. And then I heard the scream.

From the east, back down 8th Street.

I backtracked quickly, almost running. The scream came again, from up one of the side streets.

As I turned right, into it, I nearly collided against him. For a moment he loomed like a wide black wall over me.

Suddenly a dwarf, I sidestepped without looking at him, and walked on, glancing up the street. Two or three blocks away, a woman stood at the top of a stoop, screaming as she stared down at something huddled beneath her, a form that lay over the transom to the building's entrance, holding open the door. As I phased in I could see the form's aura flicker, flicker, fade.

This guy was crazy. Feeding in the middle of all these citizens, Jesus.

I turned and saw him make a right on 8th Street. I knew that now, with his thirst slaked, he'd be going home.

It was an apartment on 12th Street, just west of Fifth Avenue. Unfortunately, it had a doorman.

I told you before, doormen were a problem. Our telekinesis is strong enough to pop open an entryway lock. Our feet can pad down a hallway without waking up a paranoid cockroach. Our sense of smell can determine, through a locked door, whether the citizen inside is the right gender. Our hearing can tell us whether she's asleep. Our phasing in, once *we're* inside, can tell us whether she's the proper food. And when we get to her throat, the endorphins we secrete can keep her out until we're finished, and usually for a couple hours more.

But doormen. There's not much we can do about doormen.

I saw the big Brazilian nod to this one and step inside. I waited. I waited some more.

When I approached the lobby, I saw that it was empty. Except for that damned doorman.

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"Excuse me," I said to him. "I was just down the street, and I thought I saw a man I know come in here."

The doorman — graying, overweight, dull blue eyes, a rye nose — looked at me blankly. "Yeah?" New York doormen are famous for their wit.

"A big fella," I said. "Damn it, I can't remember his name. I met him in Brazil, in Rio...."

Relaxing, the doorman nodded. "Mr. Paulo. Sure. That was him. You want I should call him? I got the phone right here."

"No, that's all right. It's a bit late." And I hadn't fed; my prana was nearly reading empty. "But can I leave a message for him?"

He gave me paper and pen, and I left Mr. Paulo a brief note. In Portuguese. The doorman promised that he'd slip it under Mr. Paulo's door himself, after he got off from work.

Trina wasn't at the Cafe Figaro when I arrived. When I called her apartment, she hung up on me.

The next night, after I left the Plaza, I took a cab downtown. I had the cabbie wait while I stopped at the all-night drugstore in Times Square and picked up the things I'd be needing. I put them in my coat pocket. Outside the drugstore, the newsstand had a banner draped across its front: VAMPIRE KILLER!

I took the cab down to Wall Street.

That whole area, like I said before, was a dead zone at night. Deserted. Perfect for what I had in mind.

I got out of the cab at Naussau and Wall, and walked through the dark warren of narrow streets until I reached the rendezvous I'd mentioned in my message to the Brazilian.

Looking back, I ask myself why I hadn't been listening, why I hadn't kept my hearing tuned up. I suppose I was overconfident. I'd fed four times the night before, and my body was humming with prana. If I *had* been listening, everything would have turned out differently.

Anyway, my plan was simple. The rendezvous was an alley. Halfway down its length was the service entrance to a small building. I would wait behind it, my improvised weapons ready, and hold my breath for intervals of fifteen minutes. I was an hour early. When the Brazilian arrived, he wouldn't be able to hear me (wouldn't be able to smell me, either: we don't sweat). And naturally, alone in there, he'd want to take a look behind the door. When he did, he'd get a nice little surprise.

My hearing was tuned up now, and suddenly, as I walked toward the door, I heard a small scuffling sound behind me.

I wheeled around, in a crouch, and Trina said, "Just what the hell are you doing?"

She stood there at the alley entrance, purse slung over her shoulders,

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hands on her hips. She had followed me, I realized, from the Plaza.

"Trina!" I said. "Jesus *Christ!* Get the hell out of here!"

"Get out? I'm not moving an inch until you tell me what's going on. What are you *doing* down here? Why'd you lie about the oven last night? Where'd you go? I thought it was a woman, but it's something else, isn't it? Dammit, Art, tell me what's going on."

"Trina, I'll explain everything later, I promise. But right now you've got to get out of here."

"*No.*" She actually stomped her foot. "I'm not going anywhere until you tell me."

"Perhaps *I* can explain," said a deep voice from the back of the alley, and I knew it was too late. He'd been behind the door himself, of course.

I turned to face him. He was dressed all in black — slacks, turtleneck, jacket — and Jesus, he was big. I know it's impossible, but his shoulders, as he walked silently toward us, seemed to brush against the buildings on either side of the alley.

I heard Trina, beside me, take a quick, short breath.

"What has happened," he said to Trina with a small smile, "is that your friend has made a most serious mistake." The rich bass voice had only a trace of accent. We're good with languages. Still looking at Trina, still smiling, he said, "And unfortunately you, as well as he, must now pay for it."

"Oh yeah?" Trina said, her voice a bit shaky. "And just who are you, buster?" One thing about Trina, she did have spunk.

He looked at me and gave me a small frown. "You *associate* with these?"

I told him, "She's got nothing to do with this. She's leaving. This is between you and me."

"She has seen me," he said sharply.

Trina took my arm. "Art?" Almost a whisper now.

I said, "You're real good with women. Kill them here, kill them there. You're a real heroic son of a bitch, aren't you, fatso?"

He only smiled at me. "You shall go first, I think. Yes. You know, of course, what happens when the head is separated from our bodies. It is wonderfully painful, and yet the two parts live on, in agony, until the hunger kills us. For hours, we feel, we experience. We see. Yes. Such shall be your fate. Torn asunder, you shall watch as I play for a time with this pet of yours."

Trina was breathing shallowly.

"Tell me something," I said. "Before you start ripping me apart, I mean. Why do you have to kill them? What've they done to you?"

"They killed my woman." No anger in the voice; a simple statement of fact.

"No, they didn't," I said. "That girl last night, the other two. They never met the Caro sisters."

He seemed mildly surprised. "You

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know of the sisters."

"Sure. And I'm not the only one who does. There are more of us here."

He was back to his small superior smile. "Elisa had told me of this. That in some cities the People divide the hunting ground among them." He sneered. "Like grocers."

"Maybe we can work something out," I said. "You could get permission—"

"*Permission?*" he snarled. These Latin types are very big on melodrama. "I need no *permission*, fool. Not from you, not from anyone. And if I choose to kill these vermin" — he looked contemptuously at Trina — "no one shall stop me."

"Well now—"

"Enough talk," he said, and he bared his teeth. In an instant, the canines slid smoothly down to full extension. "You die now, Little One," he said to me. I jabbed my thumb at his eye.

I was counting on his reflexes, or lack of them. He'd gorged himself the night before. His prana level would be high, he'd be stronger than an ox; but he wouldn't be able, I thought, to move with any speed. I was wrong.

Oh, I got him, all right. But he jerked his head back just quickly enough to take most of the power from my jab. It hurt him, but he still had his eye.

He batted aside my arm and reached for me, teeth lunging at my neck. I pushed Trina aside, grabbed the front of his jacket, and threw my weight backwards and down, kicking up into his crotch with both feet as I fell. He went up and over, and landed behind me with an enormous thud.

But, God, talk about fast. He was up and coming at me before I had time to reach my coat pockets. He wrapped one mammoth hand around my throat, the other around my belt, swung me up over his head, and hurled me twenty feet back down the alley. I glanced off the brick wall, scraping away the back of my coat, and crashed to the asphalt.

When I pulled myself to my feet, he was walking towards me. But he was walking slowly, sure of himself, smug, savoring his victory. Fine.

I put my hands into my coat pockets and I waited.

Coming closer, he smiled. "Growing tired, Little One?"

When he was close enough, I pulled the can of Raid from my right pocket, the Ronson from my left. Holding the lighter in front of the can, I snapped its wheel as I pressed the button on the Raid. With a *swoosh* the flame shot out at his face.

He screeched, and clawed at his cindered eyes. I dropped Ronson and Raid both, then ducked as his arm flailed out blindly at me. I raced around behind him, leaped onto his back, extended my canines, and sank them into his throat.

He howled. His hands reached up and tore at me. He tried for my face, fingers ripping, but I only buried it more deeply in his neck. He pounded his fists

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at my head. I clamped my teeth together. Bellowing, he spun, trying to shake me loose, but I clung like a limpet. He reached out frantically, found the wall, and turned and slammed me back against it. Still I held on. He slammed again. I held on.

And all the while I could feel his prana gushing into me. With every second, I was growing stronger, he was growing weaker.

The fists thumping at my head had no force behind them now. He staggered once, twice, hit the wall with his shoulder. Slowly, he sank to his knees. He tried to rise — I could feel his entire body quiver — and then he collapsed.

"No," he whispered. So faintly that I barely heard it. And then, with a shudder, he was gone.

Retracting my canines, I stood up.

Prana was surging through me, snapping and crackling. I felt as though sparks were jumping from my fingers.

I looked up the alley. Trina still stood there, frozen, staring at me. She didn't move as I came towards her.

"Let's go," I said. "Trina?"

"Art," she said. Her voice cracked.

"Yeah. Let's get out of here, Trina."

"You're one of them." In a monotone.

"Right, yeah, let's go."

"You're one of them," she repeated.

I tapped her, very, very lightly, on the carotid, and she dropped. I caught her, tucked her under my arm, and left the alley.

* * *

Like I said, Trina had spunk. Only a few minutes after she came to, in my apartment, and she was over her shock. A few minutes later, and she was showering me with questions. Where was I from? How old was I really? How many of us were in New York? Was it true we did this? Was it true we did that?

For the most part, I told her the truth. I didn't jeopardize the others, but about myself I told the truth.

She had been pacing back and forth for over an hour, arms locked beneath her breasts, frowning, glancing at me, glancing away, staring at me, staring away. At last she sat down in the chair opposite me and said, "So what happens now, Art?"

I understood what she meant.

"Well," I said, "that depends on you."

She looked at me. "No. It doesn't, does it, Art? It depends on you."

"You've got to forget everything you saw tonight."

"No," she said. "I've got to get converted."

Surprised, I said, "Trina—"

"You're immortal," she said. "Right?"

"Wrong. That guy in the alley, he was one of us. I wouldn't call him immortal."

"But that was an exception, you said. For all practical purposes, you *are* immortal. That woman who converted you — Marta? — how old was she?"

"Four hundred and something. But Trina—"

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"Why the hell do you think I live the way I do? The yoga, the exercises. To keep my stomach flat? No. Every time I look in the mirror I can see the lines spreading across my face, the gray spreading through my hair. I want what you've got, Art."

I told her how difficult and time-consuming a conversion was. How a convert, even before he was converted, had to learn the basics, the traditions. How, afterward, he had to be literally spoon-fed until he mastered the use of his canines. How it took years for him to control the telekinesis, and sometimes still longer to recognize and translate the aura.

I told her that once the conversion was made, it was permanent. You never saw the sun again.

She listened to it all and at the end she said, "The way I see it, Art, you've got two options. I'm not going to keep my mouth shut about this unless you exercise one of them. You can convert me, or you can kill me."

I looked at her. She was right, of course.

I didn't really have any choice.

She was a quick study, and although we were together, all told, for ten years, she was hunting on her own after four. At the end of 1977 — September, I think it was — she moved to Mill Valley and opened up an all-night health food store. She still calls now and then, and from what she says she's doing very well.

* * *

So. That's the story of the Vampire Killer. Jesus, it's getting late. How about we hit the sack?

Your conversion? Soon, darling, soon. Hey, would I lie to you? Like I said, you got to learn the basics first.

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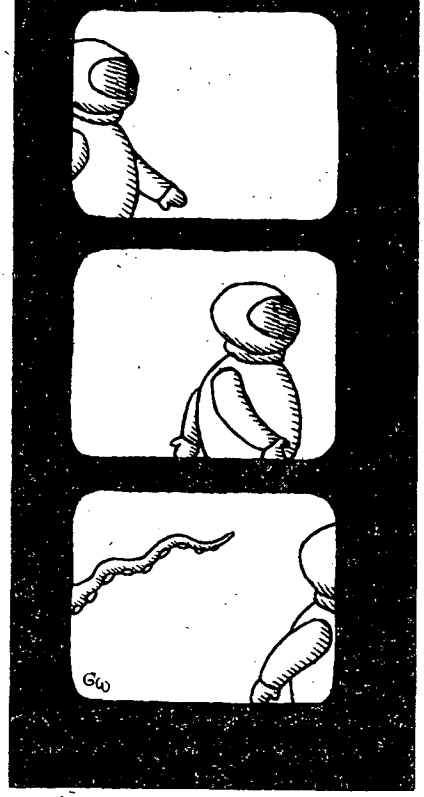
Films

BAIRD SEARLES



TUBE TWO

Picking up where we left off last month, we'll continue our survey of the scintillating season on the tube with which we were blessed this year.

More powers than those of Matthew Star were set loose early on; we were also exposed to those of Amanda Tucker in *Tucker's Witch*, a series about a sleuthing couple that could be likened to Nick and Nora Charles without Asta but with the female half powered with singularly unreliable psychic gifts. I preferred Asta myself.

The series, admittedly, got off to a promising start; the opening shot is of an alarm clock going off. It shuts itself off abruptly. "Thanks," says Rick, in bed, to Amanda, on the other side of the room. This was a neat throwaway, and generally Amanda's powers are treated with a nicely taken-for-granted attitude.

But inevitably the series bogged down in cliched thriller situations and tepid detective plots which all of Amanda's powers couldn't make interesting; if her talents had leaned toward witty or original writing, it would have helped — a psychic Nora Charles isn't *that* bad an idea.

Which is more than I can say for *The Quest*, a series undoubtedly conceived at the height of the fantasy gaming craze and implemented with a lack of awareness that the craze would go the way of the hula hoop, supplanted by video games. (We'll probably get a

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Tron-like series just as soon as the video-game fad fades.)

To make matters worse, any *real* fantasy had been carefully extracted from *The Quest*'s premise, leaving only the rather silly, Ruritanian idea of four diverse Americans (one senior, one female, one black, one TV's odd idea of "average," a good-looking but none too bright young man) who turn out to be the distant heirs to the throne of a miniscule kingdom on the Mediterranean. They are brought there and sent on a quest which has something to do with an ancient verse which the aging and childless ruler had composed the night before. I'm not really all that sure about the details, since the first ten minutes of the initial episode included a car chase, which at this point practically guarantees my brain going into neutral.

Voyagers is at least unabashedly written and scheduled for kids; it's a relief to see the juvenile openly labelled as such. The concept owes a bit to *Dr. Who* in that the hero has open access to time, and galumphs around righting, not wrongs, but temporal anomalies, to which he is alerted by a sort of pocket watch that is also his time machine. This one is also handsome but a bit dim, Dr. Who as hunk (as Matthew Star is E.T. as hunk — hunks are big this season), and he's accompanied by one of those know-it-all brats who provides the brains for the outfit (does anyone — even TV producers — find those kids appealing?).

Who-hunk's time gimmick is about as reliable as Amanda's powers and keeps dumping the two in the wrong eras, in which they get involved with famous people (the past is strictly inhabited only by the famous — I say, wasn't that Isaac Newton we just had that little chat with?). It's on a pretty primitive level — everyone, for instance, speaks contemporary English — but good humored enough. It might just arouse some interest in history and causality, though this can be undermined by a tendency to drag in characters from fictional history when the real ones won't do — Fagin & Co., for instance, with the lame excuse that Dickens had based his characters on real people of the period.

Probably the most fun of the season so far in the way of series was provided in the peripheral area of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* spinoffs, of which there have been several. The relation of this sort of pulp fiction to fantasy is very real, but too complicated to go into here. *Tales of the Gold Monkey* is set in a period (just pre-WW II) when there were still blank spaces on the map where odd things might be found, and has giant idols of mysterious alloys, species of intelligent apes unknown to science, and remnants of King Solomon's three mines enough to amuse anyone with a feeling for this sort of thing. It's done with just the right straight-faced camp, and pilot hero Jake (Stephen Collins) and spy heroine Sarah (Caitlin O'Heaney) are

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terrifically appealing, as are Jake's plane, a ramshackle Grumman Goose, and his one-eyed dog, Jack.

Finally, we got the TV version of *The Hitch Hiker's Guide To the Galaxy*, and despite being gussied up for television, the problem remains from the radio version. Either you find it funny, or you don't, humor being the most difficult of areas to analyze or criticize. I don't, myself; it seems to me the humor consists of contemporary jokes grafted onto interstellar silliness, and such matters as a drink called the Pan Galactic Gargle Blaster or the triple breasted whore of whatsis just don't move me to laughter.

On television, though, I must say the visual production is ingenious; I've derived more amusement from it than from the material. Obviously operating on a tiny budget (compared, say, to a s/f movie spectacular), the problems of alien fleets in the skies of Earth, spaceship interiors, extraterrestrial races, and the landscape of other planets have been met with intelligence and usually successfully. Again it's proved that the production of visually interesting science fiction and fantasy need not rely on huge budgets; now I'd like to see the resourcefulness lavished on HHGG devoted to something more serious (or more honestly humorous, for that matter).

Coming soon

Next month ... a brand-new novelet from **Frederik Pohl** titled "The New Neighbors," and superior deep-space sf from **Charles Sheffield**, a novella titled "Rogueworld." Also on hand and scheduled soon; new stories by **Bob Leman, Michael Bishop, Ron Goulart, Thomas M. Disch, Joe Haldeman** and others.

The May issue is on sale March 31.

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Lisa Tuttle's new story is about two sisters who buy a lonely house and discover something strange in the attic. She says it was inspired by her experience of house-hunting in Devon in the English countryside.

The Nest

BY

LISA TUTTLE

We found the house on the third day of hunting. It was in the country outside Cheltenham, half a mile from a small village: a tall, solid house standing on its own in an expanse of flat, weedy lawn surrounded by hedge.

I switched off the engine and we went on sitting in the car, staring up at the house, caught. The roof looked dilapidated, and the house had obviously stood empty for some time, but the yellow stone it was built of seemed to glow softly in the sunlight.

"Imagine living here," Sylvia said softly.

"We could," I said.

"Remember how we used to play we were the Brontë sisters? In a lonely old house on the moor."

"You could go for long walks," I said. "I'd have tea waiting for you by the fire when you came in."

She laughed, a brief, rich sound of uncomplicated pleasure.

"Let's go in," I said, and we got out and followed the broken paving stones to the door.

"How old do you suppose it is?" Sylvia asked.

I shrugged. It was a simple, solid, stone box with a tile roof. For all I knew of architecture, it could have been 20 years old, or 200.

"I hope it's really old," Sylvia said. "There's something about an old house...."

The key turned stiffly in the lock, and we stepped into a narrow, rather dark entrance hall. Rooms opened to the left and right and a steep staircase rose directly ahead. My skin prickled. Sylvia touched my hand. "It feels...." she said, very softly.

I nodded, knowing what she meant. It felt inhabited, or only very

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recently vacated — not like a house which had long stood empty. That made me cautious, and I left the door open behind us as we entered on our tour.

It was shockingly dirty. The two front rooms, large kitchen, and tiny lavatory at the back; three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs were all filthy with litter. There were newspapers, empty cans, bottles, cigarette butts, contraceptives, food wrappers, indistinguishable scraps of clothing, dead leaves and twigs, and chunks of charred wood lying everywhere. But none of the windows were open or broken, there were no graffiti scrawled on the dirty walls, and no signs of a squatter's rough habitation. It was all just garbage dumped or abandoned there for some unknown reason. And yet I couldn't lose the feeling that someone was living — or had been, until our arrival — amid all the mess.

We were together at first, touring the house, but somewhere along the way I lost Sylvia. I retraced my steps but could not find her. Outside, clouds had moved across the sun and the rooms were full of shadows. Once I froze at the sound of paper rustling in a corner. My skin crawled at the idea of the vermin that might be lurking there. I called Sylvia's name, but there was no reply.

I went outside, but she wasn't waiting for me there; the garden was empty. A loud cawing drew my attention to the tall beech trees which stood close beside the house. Half a dozen rooks were perched low in one tree, but at my look they all flapped heavily away.

"We'll have to get the roof fixed," Sylvia said from behind me.

I started and turned and saw her standing in the doorway. "Where were you?"

"There's a big hole in it. Somebody covered it with plastic, but it's all shredded now — from the wind, I guess. Rain or anything could get in. The attic floor is all covered with—"

"I didn't know there was an attic."

"Oh, yeah."

"I didn't see any stairs."

She walked down the path to join me. "There aren't any stairs. The loft door is in the ceiling of my bedroom." She giggled shyly. "Well, what could be my bedroom. There was a box there, so I used that to climb up on, and then hauled myself up. Old monkey Sylvia." She flexed her arms.

I could imagine Sylvia doing just that: seeing a trap door and pulling herself up through it without a thought for the consequences, without a fear. Headfirst into the unknown. It made me shiver, just to think of being in that dark, dank space beneath the roof.

"I suppose it would cost a lot to fix a roof," Sylvia said, staring up at the rapidly scudding clouds.

"That's probably why the price of the house is so low," I said.

"Is it?"

I nodded. "It's the cheapest of all the ones we've looked at."

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"And the best."

"You know what it is," I said. "It's the house we always dreamed of, as kids. The big old house in the English countryside."

"*Chez* Charlotte and Emily," Sylvia said. "I'll bet it's cozy in a gale."

"It is a little isolated," I said. That suited me, but Sylvia, I thought, liked parties and people, the bright lights of cities.

"That's what I want," Sylvia said. "It's perfect. I need a change ... I'm sick of cities, and city people. And I like England. I can see why you stayed here."

I smiled slightly. She had been here barely a week. "All right. Shall we hire someone to give us the bad news about the roof and the plumbing? Shall we make an offer?"

"Yes," said Sylvia. "Yes. Yes. Yes."

I want to make it clear that the house was Sylvia's idea just as much as mine. At first she was even more enthusiastic than I was, impatient to get things moving to ensure that we had a house of our own by Christmas. She expressed no doubts, no serious reservations during all the negotiations. I did not bully her, or push her into something she did not want to do. Although I was the one who first suggested we take the money from the sale of our mother's house and, instead of dividing it up in two, use it to buy one shared house, Sylvia seized upon my suggestion eagerly. It was not I, but she, who said — I remember it distinctly — how nice it would be to live together again, and how cozy we would be in our little nest in the country. I do not understand how it all went wrong.

We weren't able to get the roof fixed right away, but the local carpenter and his brother rigged a tarpaulin over the hole to keep us snug and dry. Sylvia went up into the attic to supervise, despite my assurances that it was unnecessary and that the men should be left alone to their work. I stood outside in the rare sunshine and watched the activity on the roof. I couldn't hear anything Sylvia said, but every now and then her clear laugh floated out on the breeze. I could hear the men, for all the good it did me. The heavy, foolish way the younger one was flirting with Sylvia made me prickle with embarrassment. Fortunately, stretching a tarp over a hole is no great job, and even though Sylvia invited them in for a cup of tea afterwards, we didn't have to endure their clumsy society for long.

And yet, after they had gone, a stifling silence dropped, as if the tarpaulin had fallen in on us.

"All cozy and snug now, aren't we, Sylvia?" I said, forcing the cheer.

She looked from the clutter of cups and saucers down to her hands in her lap and began to twist her ring. It was the mate to mine, a platinum band set with rubies. They had been our mother's, the guard rings she had worn on either side of her diamond wedding band.

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"What's wrong?" I asked.

She shook her head swiftly, then said in a rush, "Oh, Pam, what will I *do* here?"

I almost laughed. "Do? Why, whatever you want. This is our home now. There's plenty for both of us to do, to fix it up, and in the spring we'll plant a garden. We can grow our own vegetables."

"That's not what I mean. We're so much on our own out here. We don't know anyone. How will we meet people?"

"In the village," I said. "At church, in the pub, in shops. People are friendlier in the country than they are in London — it will be easy. Or we could have people come to visit. The house is big enough for guests."

She still looked doubtful, brooding.

"Come on," I said. "You're not having second thoughts now. It's too late for all that. The house is ours now. You'll love it here — just give it a chance."

"It's just ... it's such a change from what I'm used to...."

"But that's what you said you wanted. And after Mother died whatever you did would have been a big change. How do you think you'd like living all by yourself in Edison? That boyfriend of yours wouldn't have been much help."

"Stop it," she said. "I left him, didn't I? That's over."

"I'm just trying to point out that you could be a lot worse off than you are. Think how miserable you would have been if you'd let that affair drag on. What could he offer you. Nothing. He would never have left his wife, so you couldn't hope for marriage, or any kind of security—"

She glared at me. "I never wanted security from him. I knew what I was doing. I wasn't trying to get him to marry me. It wasn't security I wanted — he gave me something else. Adventure, a feeling of excitement."

"Oh, excitement," I said. "That'll do you a lot of good."

"I don't expect you to understand. After Mother died I felt I needed something else ... he wasn't enough. That's why I came here. And it's over, so why do you keep bringing it up?"

She stood up, gathering the tea things together with a noisy clatter. As I watched her I wondered if she would ever, without me, have summoned the nerve to break up with her lover. I remembered how she had been at Mother's funeral, how dazed and helpless, sending me those blue-eyed looks that begged for rescue. In moments of crisis she always turned to her big sister for help, and was grateful for my advice.

I remember, as clearly as if it had happened yesterday, an incident from our adolescence. We'd gone down to the drugstore as we often did, on an errand for our mother. Ready to leave, I had looked around for Sylvia. I found her at last in the shadow of a hulking, black-leather-jacketed boy. My im-

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mediate inclination was to go, and let Sylvia find her own way home. Boys, especially boys like that, made me uneasy. Usually they ignored me, but they were always hovering around my little sister, drawn to her blonde prettiness and easy charm.

Then Sylvia caught sight of me, and the look she sent was an unmistakable cry for help. My heart beat faster as I approached, wondering what on earth I could do. As I reached her side she said, "Oh, gee, I've got to go — my sister's waiting for me." She took my arm and — I didn't even have to speak to the monster — we were away.

Outside, safe, she began giggling. She told me how awful he was and how nervous she had been until she saw me. "He's dropped out of school, imagine! And he wanted to take me for a ride on his motorbike — I couldn't think how to say no, how to get away without making him mad. Then, thank goodness, *you* were there to save me."

I basked in her praise, believing that I *had* saved her from some awful fate. But only a week later I saw the horrible black leather jacket again: Sylvia's arms were tight around him as she sat on his motorcycle, and on her face was a look of blissful terror, beyond my saving.

On Christmas Eve I went looking for Sylvia. Upstairs all was dark, but still I called her name.

"I'm in here."

Surprised, I went forward and found her sitting in her bedroom.

"All alone in the dark, Sylvia?" I switched on the bedside lamp.

"Don't." She held up a shielding hand. I saw that she had been crying, and I sighed. There was chair situated oddly in the center of the room. I moved it closer to the bed and sat down.

"You're not doing yourself any good, Sylvia, sitting alone and crying. Anyway, he's not worth crying over."

"How would you know? You never met him."

"I know enough from what you told me. The facts speak for themselves: a married man, who couldn't even be bothered to come to Mother's funeral, to be with you when he must have known how much you—"

"God, I wish I'd never told you! Can't you ever leave me alone, let me make my own mistakes?"

"If you really want to go back to him, I won't stop you."

"You know it's too late." She stared down at her lap, looking like a sullen child. "Anyway, I don't want to. I wasn't crying about *him*."

I felt embarrassed and full of remorse. Of course. Of course. It was Christmas Eve — her first not spent with Mother.

"Come on," I said gently. "You'll only make yourself feel worse, sitting up here alone. Come downstairs and help me decorate the tree. We always used to do that on Christmas Eve, remember? I've got a fire going, and I thought I'd make some mulled wine.

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We'll put the Christmas Oratorio on — would you like that?"

"All right," she said, her voice dreary. "But in a minute. Just give me a minute alone."

I hesitated, hating to leave her in such a mood. Her hand went out and switched off the light.

"Sitting alone in the dark," I said. "Well." I stood up and moved uncertainly towards the door. "You always used to be afraid of the dark."

She gave a heavy sigh. "Not for years, Pam. And it never scared me half as much as it did you."

I left without answering. I was surprised, and a little shaken, to discover that she knew that about me. I had always been terrified of the dark. Even now a residual uneasiness lingered. But my own fear had always meant very little to me beside my obligation to protect my little sister. I had been her scout and protector, going ahead of her into darkened rooms to turn on the light and make certain no monsters lurked. I remembered the night my protectorate had ended, when Sylvia had turned on me, screaming, "Leave me alone! Leave me alone! You never let me do anything! I'm not a baby, I'm not scared!" To prove it, to free herself from my loving care, she had rushed headlong, alone, into the terrifying dark.

On Christmas Day Sylvia vanished. It was to be the first of many such disappearances, although I didn't know that at the time. I had no particular reason for searching for her, but finding her room empty made me curious, and I went on a circuit of the house. I hadn't heard her go out, and looking out the window I saw that the car was still parked in the drive, and there was no one in sight. I went upstairs again, thinking that somehow I had missed her, but still the rooms were empty. In her room I found a straight-backed chair in an odd position, almost blocking the door. I had my hands on it to move it when I happened to glance up. The loft door was directly overhead.

I stared up, wondering. "Sylvia," I said loudly. "Sylvia?"

Footsteps sounded, so close over my head that I winced. Then the door clattered open and Sylvia's head, the fine hair all tangled rattails, swung out and smiled, "Hi."

"What are you doing up there?"

"Cleaning."

"On Christmas Day?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Well, it doesn't sound like much fun."

"I got bored with reading. Anyway, I thought I'd better get it cleaned before the roofers come."

"There's no rush. We won't get anyone to fix the roof until after the holidays."

"I know. I just felt like doing it. O.K.?"

"I thought we could take a walk."

"Not right now."

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"It's lovely out."

"Great, you go for a walk. Maybe I'll be finished when you get back. Have fun." Her head swung up out of sight and the door — really nothing more than a flimsy piece of wood — came clattering down to close me out.

Having suggested a walk, I now felt obligated to go for one, but I was not in a good mood as I set out. Sylvia wasn't being fair, I thought. It was Christmas, after all: a special, family holiday. We should celebrate it by doing something together. Was that really asking too much of Sylvia? I argued it out with her in my imagination as I put on coat, hat, boots, and gloves, and by the time I had reached the road she had apologized and explained that cleaning out the attic was by way of being a present to me.

It was a cold, clear day and the air tasted faintly of apples. Since the ground was not too muddy, I soon left the road and struck off across the fields. I was traveling to the east of the house, up a hill, and the exertion of climbing soon had me feeling warm and vigorous. When I reached the top of the hill I paused to catch my breath and survey the countryside. Our house was easily picked out because it stood away from the village, amid fields and farmlands, and my eyes went to it at once. The sight of it made me smile, made me feel proud, as if it were something I had made and not merely bought. There were the yellow stones of my house; there the bright green patch of the untended garden; there the spiky winter trees standing close to the east wall, like guardians.

I squinted and pressed my glasses further up my nose, closer to my eyes, unable to believe what I saw. There was something large and black in one of the trees; something that reminded me horribly of a man crouching there, spying on the house. Absurd, it couldn't be — but there *was* something there, something much bigger than a rock or a cat. Something that did not belong; something dangerous.

I fidgeted uneasily, aware that if I ran down the hill now I would lose sight of it. It might be gone by the time I reached the house, and I might never know what it had been. If only I could see it better, get a better view.

Perhaps it was only a black plastic garbage bag tossed into the branches by the wind and caught there.

As I thought that, the black thing rose out of the tree — rose flapping — and half-flew, half-floated towards the roof-top. And vanished.

Lost against the dark tiles? Suddenly I wondered about that tarpaulin. How tightly was it fixed? How easily could it be lifted? Could something still get in through the hole in the roof? Something like that horrible black flapping thing?

I thought of Sylvia alone in the attic, unsuspecting, unprotected. I moaned, and stumbled down the hill. I kept seeing things I didn't want to see. Something horrible looming over Syl-

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via. Sylvia screaming and cowering before something big and black and shapeless; something with big black wings. I would be too late, no matter how fast I ran. Too late. As I ran across the empty winter fields towards the house, the tears rolled down my cheeks and I could hardly catch my breath for sobbing.

"Sylvia!" I could scarcely get her name out as I burst into the house. I felt as if I had been screaming it forever. "Sylvia!" I staggered up the stairs, catching hold of the flimsy rail and foolishly using it to haul myself upwards. "Sylvia!"

I could hear nothing but my own ragged breathing, my own voice, my own thundering feet. I stood in her room, too frightened to mount the chair and push open the loft door. "Sylvia!"

Above me, the board clattered and was pulled away, and Sylvia looked out, flushed, angry, concerned. "What it it?"

I caught the back of the chair and held it. Finally I managed to whisper, "Come down. Now. Please."

She frowned. "All right. But I wish you'd tell me...." Her head drew back and her feet came down, flailed a moment, then found purchase on the chair seat. She let herself down and pulled the door shut after her.

I caught her arm. "You're all right?"

"Yes, of course I'm all right. You look awful. What's wrong?"

"I saw something ... from the hill.... I was looking down at the house and I saw it. Something big and black, crouching in the tree where it shouldn't have been. And then it flew towards the roof. And then I couldn't see it anymore, and I thought it might have gotten in, through the hole, you know."

She regarded me uneasily. "What must have gotten in? What did you see? A bird?"

I shook my head. "Something bigger. Much, much bigger. Like a man. It flew, but it wasn't a bird. It couldn't have been. Not an ordinary bird. It was huge and black and flapping. I was afraid. I knew you were up in the attic, and with that hole in the roof ... you said yourself, anything could get in. Anything. I saw it. I was so afraid for you."

"I think you'd better sit down and rest," Sylvia said. "I'll make you some tea."

"You didn't see anything? Nothing came into the attic?"

"You can see I'm all right."

"You were alone? Nothing came in?"

She led me out of the room and I followed her downstairs, desperate for reassurance, wanting to hear her say that there had been nothing in the attic with her. Instead, she said, "I don't understand what you think happened. Tell me again what you saw."

I was silent, trying to remember. It was suddenly difficult to sort out fact

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from fantasy, the reality of what I had seen from the terrifying vision which had obsessed me while I struggled back to the house. Sylvia threatened; Sylvia engulfed or embraced by something, by someone.... "I don't know," I said at last. "I saw something. I don't know what it was."

The Monday after Christmas I went to Cheltenham to pick up some material for curtains — and went alone. Sylvia wasn't interested in going, although I had planned the trip as a treat for her.

"We could make a day of it," I said. "Do some shopping, have a meal, see a film — whatever you like."

Sylvia only smiled and shook her head.

"Why do you want to stay here alone? What will you do while I'm gone?"

"What makes you think it will be any different from what I do while you're here?"

I hadn't meant that at all, but her words awakened suspicion. "Please come," I said. "It'll do you good to get out of the house."

She smiled. "I'll take a walk. That'll get me out of the house. It's a nice day for it. I haven't really explored the neighborhood yet."

And so I drove away on my own, feeling uneasy. Once in Cheltenham I had no urge to linger. I bought the material, filled the gas tank, and drove back home without stopping for so much as a cup of coffee.

The house did not feel empty when I came in. Sylvia might have gone out for a walk, I knew, but I went through the house quietly, looking for her. I was in the upstairs hall when I heard the sound; I'm sure it would not have been audible downstairs. The sound came from the attic, directly overhead. It was a rustling, scrabbling sort of sound, with the occasional small thump, as of something moving around. I stopped breathing and stood still, staring at the featureless white ceiling, so low I could almost have reached up and touched it, to feel the movements on the back of my hand. The scrabbling sound gradually retreated as I listened, and finally stopped.

I bolted down the stairs and out the front door. It would have to come out through the hole in the roof — I was sure of it. I might see it on the roof or in the high branches of the tree nearest the house. I would be able to see what I had seen from the hill, and this time, perhaps, I would recognize it. It would have been a reward to see anything, even a rook, but although I circled the house, craning skyward, I saw nothing that moved against the dark roof or the pale sky. Finally I gave up and went back into the house.

Sylvia was in the hall. I wondered how she had managed to slip past me. She looked flushed and slightly out of breath.

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"Your shirttail's out," I said.

She smiled vaguely and stuffed it back into her jeans.

"Did you have a nice walk?"

"Mmm, lovely." She drifted away towards the kitchen.

"I heard something just now. In the attic."

She stopped and looked back at me. "When? I thought you just got back?"

"I did just get back. I went upstairs to look for you and heard something moving in the attic. So I went outside to see if there was anything on the roof."

She went on looking at me.

I shrugged, admitting defeat. "I didn't see anything."

She turned away. "You want coffee or tea? I'm going to put the kettle on."

"Coffee. Thanks." I watched her walk away from me.

It proved remarkably difficult to get someone to agree to come out and fix the roof before March. In this part of the world, it seemed, one booked roof repairs further ahead than wedding receptions or holidays. I complained about it to Sylvia, who was indifferent.

"So what? There's no rush. There's that tarp over the hole to keep the rain out."

"That was supposed to be a temporary thing," I said. "And what if it's gotten loose? We've had some windy nights. It might be flapping free, letting things in."

She looked at me with a little half-smile. "Do you want me to go up and check that it's still in place?"

"Up on the roof, you mean?"

"I can see it from the attic. I can touch it, for that matter."

I shrugged. "Well, I could go up into the attic and see for myself."

"Of course you could." She looked back down at her magazine, smiling to herself. She was curled up in one of the two matching armchairs I had arranged on either side of the wood-burning stove. The ruby chips on her fingers glittered as she turned a page.

"Do you know, I've never actually been into the attic?" I was certain, as I asked, that she knew.

"Well, you're not missing much," she said calmly. She continued to read, and I paced the room, which I'd made comfortable and appealing with carefully selected furniture, dark brown curtains, and a beige carpet. I wondered if she knew that I was afraid of the attic — that dirty, dark place where *something* might lurk. She seemed so cool.... But then maybe I was imagining things. Maybe she had nothing to hide. I should go up to the attic and see for myself, settle my mind there, poking my head up into the unknown darkness, my knees went weak and there was a tightness in my chest. No. There was no need to go up. If anything ever came into the attic, Sylvia would surely tell me, and ask for my help, just as she had at our mother's grave, and a hundred times before.

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The gray winter days dragged slowly by. It seemed always to be raining, or to be about to rain. I drew up lists of the improvements we would make in our house, the things we needed to buy, the vegetables and flowers we would grow in our garden.

Sylvia's disappearances became more frequent. Sometimes she claimed to have been out for a walk — yes, even in the rain — and sometimes that she had been in the house all along. I had to be careful. She was suspicious of my questions, and I didn't want to provoke her. Let her tell me all, in her own good time. I never mentioned the attic, or the sounds I heard at night. I pretended that I noticed nothing, and I waited.

And then one night I woke and knew that something was wrong. It was late: the moon was down and there was no light. The darkness lay on me like a weight. I got up, shivering, and wrapped myself in my dressing gown. As I stepped into the hall I could see that Sylvia's door was shut and no light came from beneath it.

She's asleep, I thought. Don't disturb her.

But even as I cautioned myself I was shuffling forward, and my outstretched hand had grasped the doorknob. When the door was open I could see nothing in the blackness, and there was no sound. I reached for the light switch. Squinting in the harsh light, I saw that Sylvia's bed was empty.

I leaned against the doorframe, blinking miserably at the undisturbed bed. She hadn't even slept in it.

Then I heard the noise.

There was someone in the attic. The sounds were soft but unmistakable, the sounds of movement. Floorboards creaked gently, rhythmically, beneath a moving weight, and there was a jumble of softer sounds as well. I held my breath and listened, struggling to make sense of what I heard, trying to separate the sounds and identify them. I closed my eyes and held tightly to the doorframe. Above me, the soft sounds paused, continued, paused, continued. Was it: cloth against flesh, flesh against flesh, a struggle, an embrace, a sob, a breath, a voice?

I snapped off the light and the loud click made me shudder. They might hear. I scuttled out of the room, back through the darkness to my bed, terrified the whole way that I would hear the wooden slide of the trap door and the sound of something coming after me.

The door to my room, like the doors to all the other rooms, had a keyhole but no key. I pushed my bedside table against the door, knowing it was no protection, and huddled on my bed, shaking. I wiped the tears off my face and listened. I could hear nothing now, but I did not know if that was because of the location of my room, or because there was nothing more to hear. I took the edge of the sheet into my mouth to keep from making a sound and tried not to think. I

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waited for morning.

But it was some time before morning when I heard the motorbike on the road below the house. Listening to the approach, the pause, and then the sound of it roaring away again, it struck me that I had heard that same sequence of sounds outside the house more than once before. As I puzzled miserably over that, I heard the front door open.

Fear and sorrow drained away, leaving me empty and as cold as ice. I heard Sylvia climbing the stairs. I knew that labored, guilty tread well, having heard it many nights when she was in high school, sneaking home late from her dates.

I met her in the hall.

"Pam!" Her face whitened, and she moved a little backwards, hand clutching the stair rail as if she would retreat downstairs.

"We'll have to get that roof fixed," I said calmly. "No more excuses, It can't wait. I don't care what it costs, if we have to get someone to come all the way from London, whatever it takes, we can't go another day with that hole in the roof."

"What?"

"Anything could get in," I said. "You said so yourself. Anything could get in. Or get out. Come or go, day or night. It's an easy climb from the roof down that big beech tree."

Sylvia gave me a cautious, measuring look, and took my arm. "Pam, you've been dreaming. I'm sorry I woke you. I was trying to be quiet. Now go back to bed."

I pulled away. "I didn't dream those sounds. You can't fool me. I didn't dream your empty bed. What were you doing up there?"

She exhaled noisily. "I was out."

"Yes, I heard you come in. That's always your excuse when you disappear — you were out. Out for a walk, even in the middle of the night. I know where you really went, and I'm sick of your stories. I want the truth. I want to know what's going on up there."

Sylvia's face was hard. "I don't care what you want. I don't care what you think. I don't have to tell you anything. I don't have to explain myself to you." She pushed past me, into her room, and closed the door.

I said, "You think I'm afraid to go up there, don't you? You thought I'd never find out. Well, you were wrong."

She did not answer, although I waited, and finally I went back to my room. Through the wall I heard the faint sounds of Sylvia moving about, then the snapping of a light-switch, and then only silence. I listened for the rest of the night, but she didn't move again. Only her bed creaked occasionally, as she turned in her sleep.

When the sky turned pale and gray morning lit the room I dressed myself in jeans, pullover, and boots. As an afterthought I pulled on a pair of heavy gloves and hefted a flashlight in my hand like a weapon. I knew that if I

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thought about what I was going to do I would be too frightened to go on. I had to do it — not for myself, but for Sylvia.

She didn't stir when I entered her room. I stood for a moment, looking at her sleeping shape humped beneath blankets, remembering her anger. All our lives I had helped her, and she had rarely been grateful. But I didn't need her gratitude. I wanted her safety.

There was no way to enter the attic other than headfirst, and with difficulty. I set the chair below the door and hesitated, sweat trickling down my back at the prospect of pulling myself up, defenseless, into the unknown. Finally I went ahead and did it, climbing onto the chair, lifting aside the lightweight board that served as a door, and then, wriggling and straining, hauling myself up through the opening as quickly as I could.

I found myself in a low, dim, dusty space piled with litter. Covering the floorboards thickly were leaves, twigs, fragments of board and brick, scraps of paper, dust, soil, and dead insects. Just the sort of place I hated most. If Sylvia had cleaned up, I could see no sign of her work. I switched on the flashlight and pointed it around, wishing the light had a purifying as well as illuminating power. I played it on a huge heap of rubbish which must have piled up and remained untouched for ages. Bits and pieces of it were recognizable within the mess as fragments of newspaper, food wrappings, and cloth. There was so much of it that I wondered dazedly if the previous owners of the house could have been so far gone as to use their own attic as a garbage dump.

A garbage dump. That's what I thought, shining my light at it. Bits and pieces blown in through the hole in the roof or deliberately left by the tenants. Bits of newspaper, cloth, wood, and cardboard plastered together with mud and hay, twigs and leaves and bits of string to form a coherent whole.

Rather like a nest.

But it was *huge*. It couldn't be. Why, it was nearly as tall as I was, and wider than my bed. What kind of animal—

Ridiculous. And yet, now that I had thought of it, I could not stop seeing the big pile as a nest, a shelter of some kind. There was a pattern to it: it was a deliberate construction, not a random pile at all. Something or someone had built it.

Feeling sick at the thought, I stepped closer, holding my light before me. I was hoping that if I saw it more clearly, or from some other angle, that the illusion of structure would collapse. I began to circle it.

Then I found the entrance. My attention was drawn by a white cloth, the brightness of it startling against the mottled gray-brown of everything else. As I bent down to take a closer look, I saw that it was lying half-in, half-out of a narow, molded entranceway. My light showed me a short, narrow crawl

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space which took a sudden, sharp turn, cutting off visual access to the interior. It was big enough for me to enter on hands and knees, but the idea was too horrible to consider.

Feeling like a coward, but unable to force myself on, I grabbed hold of the white cloth and pulled it free.

I looked down at what I held in my hands. It was one of Sylvia's nightgowns.

Somehow, I got down out of the attic, I stood in Sylvia's room, my heart pounding hard enough to make me sick, and I watched her sleep, and I did not scream.

The pest-control man agreed to come out that very day. I suspect he pegged me as a hysterical woman, but at least he was willing to drive out to the house with his full arsenal of traps and poisons and see what might live in the attic.

He was a big, beefy, red-faced, no-nonsense sort of man, and I wondered how his composure would stand up to the sight of that nest in the attic. He stared, stolid and faintly contemptuous, as I struggled to describe what I had seen.

"What sort of thing would build such a nest? And in an attic? What could be living up there?" I asked him.

He only shrugged. "I'm sure I couldn't say. I'll have a look."

I had roused Sylvia before his arrival. Now she stood by and said nothing as this solid, sensible man climbed into the attic. My nerves were singing; I couldn't bear to be so close to her. Abruptly I turned and went away downstairs where I could sit and shake without having to explain myself. I had wadded up Sylvia's nightgown and thrown it on the floor while she still slept. I had not been able to confront her with it, and she had not mentioned it to me.

When the man came down out of the attic, his manner was unchanged and he gave his ponderous, practical report.

"You do have mice, and spiders. An old house like this, with the fields so close, it stands to reason. You might want to get a cat. Good company they are, too, cats. I saw no sign of rats, so you can be easy on that. You want to get that roof fixed, of course, and clear up all that mess. I can put down poison and traps...."

"I don't care about mice," I said sharply. "What made that nest, that's what I want to know. You're not telling me it was built by mice?"

"Stands to reason they'd nest there," he said.

"I'm sure it does. But what built that huge nest in the first place?"

He looked a shade uncertain. "Maybe you'd like to come up and point it out to me. Maybe I don't know which nest you mean. Maybe I missed it."

"You can't possibly have missed it! It's huge — I've never seen anything

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like it. Five feet tall, at least, and made of twigs and straw and mud and bits of old newspaper and—"

"You mean that heap of rubbish? Shocking the way it's piled up, isn't it? It's because of that you've got the spiders and the wood lice and everything."

"It's not just a rubbish heap," I said patiently. "It's a nest. *The* nest. If you'd looked at it properly you would have seen that it didn't just grow, it was put together as a shelter, with an entranceway and everything. If you were doing your job, you should have seen that. You just left it?"

He gave me a blank, steady look. "It's not my job to clean up other people's rubbish. Not very pleasant sorting through it to see what might live there, but I poked my stick in and turned it over and stirred it around. That's how I know about mice and all. It's no wonder you've got them, a mess like that. You need to get it cleaned up. Hire someone, if you don't fancy tackling it yourself. Once you've got that lot cleared away and the roof fixed, you won't have any trouble."

I recognized the sort of man he was. If he couldn't understand something, then for him it did not exist. There was probably no way I could get him to see what I had seen. Well, it didn't matter, and I agreed with his advice. "Could you recommend someone to clear it away for me?"

"I do have a nephew who does the odd job," he said. "Since you ask."

The nephew came out that same afternoon to do his work, as did a team of roof-menders for a preliminary survey. Getting the roof mended took a full week and more. It could be done no faster, no matter how I stressed the need, no matter what bonuses I promised. Winter days were short. They told me they would do the best they could.

During this period, when the house was always full of workmen, Sylvia and I barely communicated. She went out, most days, and did not tell me where she went. But these were not like her previous disappearances, and so they did not worry me. I saw her go out through the front door every time, and saw her walk down the road and turn towards the village. She did not return until after dark, when the house was empty and still again. I saw those days as a precarious interval: once I had made the house safe there would be time to talk, opportunity to mend the rift that had come between us.

Finally it was done. The roof was fixed and the house was whole again. Sylvia and I sat in the warm front room that evening, each in an armchair with a book. I couldn't concentrate on mine; I looked around, admiring the harmony of the room, the warm conjunction of colors and furnishings, all so carefully chosen.

Sylvia said, "You're happy here."

I smiled. "Of course. Aren't you?"

She didn't answer and I wished I hadn't asked. "You will be," I said.

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"Give it time." I hesitated, and then added, very low, "I did it for you."

"I know how much this house means to you," Sylvia said. "And you're happy here. This is your place. I wouldn't expect you to give it up just because I ... you wouldn't have to pay me back, even though it was half my money."

"What are you talking about?"

"I mean if I were to go away."

"But why should you?"

She shrugged and shifted in her chair. "If I ... stopped wanting to live here."

"Have you?"

"If I were to get married. You wouldn't want my husband to move in here with us?"

"No, of course not." The idea made me tense. "But why talk about that now? It's not likely to happen for years. Is it? There's not someone now ... someone you want to marry?"

She sighed and fidgeted and then suddenly glared at me. "No. There isn't anyone I want to marry. But someday, maybe, I'll meet a man I do want to marry. And then I'll want to go away and live with him. That fantasy we had as children would never work, you know. We're not going to marry two brothers and all live together in one house! Someday I'll want a house of my own—"

"Then what's this?" I demanded. "*This* is your house. You can't go on waiting for your life to start with your husband. You're not a child; you're grown up and you made the decision to come live here with me. This is *our* home; we have an equal responsibility for it. If you're not happy here, then we can sell it and move somewhere else. We're not trapped. Only a child would talk about leaving like that, as if the only choice you can see is between running away and staying. Just tell me what you want, and we'll work together for it."

"Maybe I want something you can't give me."

"Oh? And what's that? Excitement? True love? What is it you want?"

"I don't know," she muttered, suddenly unable to meet my eyes.

"Well, if you don't know, *I* certainly don't. You can't go through your life expecting other people to solve your problems for you, and give you what you want, you know. You've got to accept responsibility for your own life at some point."

"I'm trying to," she said softly, staring into her lap.

"Sylvia, please tell me about it. I'll try to understand, but you must give me the chance. Don't blame me too much — I was trying to help. I wanted to save you."

She stared at me. "What are you talking about?"

I wanted to scrape that fake innocence off her face with a knife. I wanted to slap her, to hurt her into honesty. These lies, the unspoken words kept us apart. If she would only confess we could begin again, start clean.

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"The attic," I said, watching her like a hawk. I cleared my throat and began again. "Now that the roof has been fixed, and all that garbage cleared out, we could use the attic as another room. You could buy some paints and make it your studio."

"Why do you keep going on about that?" she cried.

"Going on about what?"

"About my painting! As if I did!"

"You used to. You were very good."

"I never did."

"Now, Sylvia, you know—"

"All I ever did was take an art class when I was fourteen. Because I had to do *something* — everyone did — and if I didn't find something of my own I'd have had to take dancing classes with *you*. That's all it ever was."

I'd let her evade the real issue long enough. "But what about the attic?"

She threw herself out of her chair. "Oh, do what you like with it! I don't care. Just don't fool yourself that you're doing it for me." She was on her way out of the room as she spoke.

"Sylvia, wait, can't we talk?"

"No, I don't think we can." She didn't look back.

Later that night, after I had gone to bed, I heard Sylvia moving around restlessly in her room. Then I heard the soft, unmistakable clatter of the attic door.

I held my breath. She was safe; I knew she was safe. The attic was clean and bare and utterly empty, and the roof was intact. But I had to know what she was doing up there. Since she wouldn't tell me, I would have to find out for myself. I rose from my bed and went into the hallway, where I could hear.

I heard her footsteps, light and unshod, making the softest of sounds against the wood floor. She was walking back and forth. Pacing. First slowly, then more quickly, almost in a frenzy. She began to cry: I heard her ragged, sobbing exhalations. She said something — perhaps called out a name — but I could hear only the sounds, not the sense of them. The cold air in the hall made me shiver, but I worried more about Sylvia, barefoot and in her thin nightdress in the unheated attic. I longed to go and comfort her, but I knew she would reject me. She needed time to adjust, time to accept what I had done for her. Finally I went back to bed, leaving her to her lonely sorrow.

It was midmorning when I awoke, and the room was filled with sunlight. My heart lifted with pleasure. It would be a beautiful day for a long ride in the car. There was a ruined castle not far away that Sylvia would love. We could take a picnic lunch with us.

When I had dressed I went to her room and flung open the door. "Wake up, sleepyhead!"

The words rang embarrassingly in the empty room. I saw that the bed had not been slept in.

My heart thudded sickeningly and I

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tasted something bitter. If, after all my care—

Then I had a sudden, sane vision of Sylvia, exhausted and sleeping alone on the floor of the attic, worn out with crying. I went up to fetch her.

But the attic was empty. Or nearly. Something glittered on the bare boards and I saw that it was Sylvia's ring, her half of the pair our mother had left us. I knew how much Sylvia had cherished it. She would never have lost it, never have left it behind carelessly. But there it was, and Sylvia was gone.

I searched the house and found that she had taken away a bag of clothes. She had left no note.

The days passed and faded into night, but Sylvia did not return nor call. Had she been seduced away, kidnapped? She hadn't said anything about leaving. She must mean to come back, she must.

As the days blended one into the other in the still, silent house, I asked myself again and again why she had gone. I asked myself how I could have prevented it, and I found a hard answer. By trying to keep her, I had forced her to go. I had held her too tightly, refusing to let her have any life of her own. She was a woman, not a child, and her rebellion was natural. I had driven her away.

"Maybe I want something you can't give me," she had said. But what she wanted was so horrible! The memory of that dark, filthy den in the attic, her discarded nightgown shimmering whitely against it, still sent a shudder through me. I would not, could not follow her there. Our childhood fantasy of marrying brothers had never seemed more impossible.

But why couldn't we both have what we wanted? Why did I have to live without her? Understanding more now, I was willing to give more, even to share her, if she would only come back. I would no longer try to change or bind her; I would leave the attic, and her life up there, strictly alone. She could bring her husband, or whatever he was, to the house and I would not interfere. If only I could tell her so. If only she would give me another chance.

One day I went up to the attic with the toolkit and set to work on the roof. The hammer did no good at all, and I broke my knife and screwdriver against it. Finally I went down to the village and bought an ax. I was soaking with sweat and rain and my hands were bleeding before I was through, but I got it done at last. The new hole was even bigger than the old; quite big enough for anything to get through. I stuck my head out, scaring off a couple of rooks who had come to examine my work, and I looked around at the heavy gray sky and the bare trees, searching for something large and black flapping on the horizon. I saw nothing like that. The rain ran into my eyes and I retreated.

We hadn't been in the house long enough to acquire much in the way of

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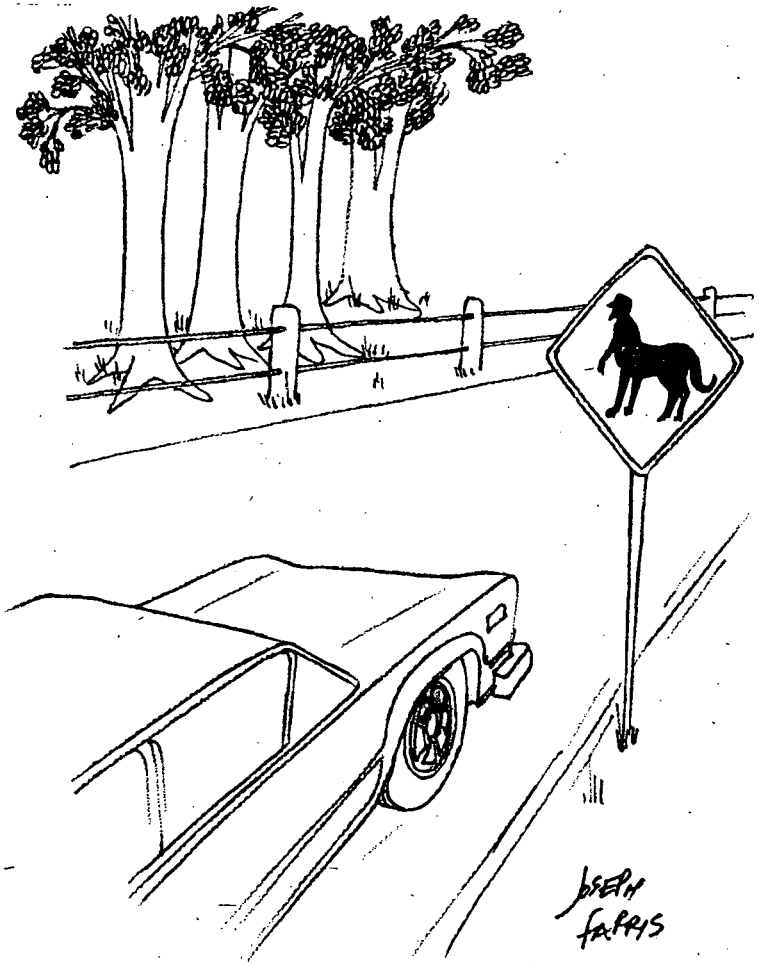
rubbish, but I took the old newspapers and magazines we'd been saving to recycle, and the bag of garbage from the kitchen, and carried it all up to the attic. Working fast in the gathering dark and cold rain, I raked up a sackful of dead leaves and twigs from the garden, and picked up broken branches from beneath the trees. Still it wasn't enough, so I took the ax to a couple of chairs, tore the stuffing out of my pillows, and scissored up a few old clothes.

It's a start, anyway. A sign of my goodwill. All I can do now is wait. And so I do, lying in Sylvia's bed every night, listening for noises from above.



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Here is a fine Irish fantasy from a new writer who tells us: "I'm a librarian with Brooklyn Public Library (Phi Beta Kappa in English from Catholic University). I grew up with an Irish oral tradition; my grandparents used to make up wonderful stories for me. Later on I made up my own, for the amusement of the neighborhood kids. Eventually I wrote them down. I'm currently at work on a novel about Silken Thomas."

The Vengeance of Nora O'Donnell

BY
GIL FITZGERALD

The first time Michael O'Donnell, the young schoolmaster in Kilrana, laid eyes upon Nora Fitzgerald, he thought her a plain brown wren of a woman, if he thought of her at all. This was natural enough, for Nora was plain, and she'd have been the first to say so, a small slip of a girl with mouse-colored hair and brown skin and sad, dark eyes. There was nothing there to catch the eyes of a flame-haired giant like Michael, who had all the prettiest girls for miles about chasing after him, so that he would never have had to cook a supper for himself, if he'd accepted all the invitations they made to him. Not that Michael was vain, for he wasn't, and that was part of what sent the girls mad for him, but he'd have had to be a saint not to know what a stir he caused from the day he took over the village school from old Mr. Moran.

It was at a village ceilidh that they met, and Michael was swinging Biddy McGuire in a reel when Nora walked in with her sister Kathleen and her husband. Michael's bright head was the first thing she saw, and no wonder, for he stood a head taller than any other man in the room. She forgot all she'd learned of good manners, and stared; she couldn't help herself. Michael looked to her like all the heroes she'd sung about, some lord of the sidhe come to sport with mortal men, so fine and strong and straight was he, or else one of the mighty warriors from the old days, Lugh or Cuchulain or Connal born again. Afraid he'd see her, afraid he would not, she clung to her harp, and made her way to a corner where she could hide as she always did, shy and quiet, till someone asked her to play.

No one asked her to dance, and she

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didn't expect them to. Nora was an old maid at twenty-four, and she had no hopes of marrying. She was a practical woman, and not one to waste her time crying over what she could not have. Instead, she gave herself over to the music, and to watching Michael's laughing face as he danced with one woman after another, but never once glancing in her direction. It was not much, but it was enough for her. When the musicians had to stop for a rest, and to wet their throats, Rory McGuire called to her to give them a song, and the crowd in the village hall settled down to listen.

She drew her harp from its wrappings and set it on her lap, and she began to sing. She sang of Ireland and of the men who'd died for her, of the ones who'd left for America and not come back, of the chiefs who once ruled in the days before the English came. And then she began to sing an old, old lament in Gaelic, and her beautiful, clear voice had all the sadness that has been the lot of Irish wives for a thousand years. She raised her bright, dark eyes from her harpstrings, and saw Michael looking at her.

When she had put away her harp, he took her hand wordlessly, and led her out of the hall to the moonlit stillness of the summer's night. For a long moment he stood gazing down at her, and he saw the shining spirit that lived within her burning in her dark eyes. Here was a woman strong and bright as the finest steel, a sword blade of a woman, and he knew he loved her. He wanted to tell her, but did not dare, for surely he had nothing to offer such a woman, a poor schoolmaster without even an acre of land to his name?

So he said only, "Where did you learn to harp like that, Nora Fitzgerald? I thought the old bards were gone these three hundred years."

"My father was a harper, and his father before him, all the way back to one who was a bard for the great Geraldines," she said simply. "My father had no sons with a talent for it, so he taught me instead of my brothers."

"You've a voice that could call the sidhe back from their raths to listen to you. Nora, you're a wonder, you are that, and it's afraid I am that I'll love you."

"Why fear it, Michael?" she said simply. "I'm no wonder, only a woman, and one who loves you as well."

He kissed her then, and it was settled between them. He told her, laughing, that she'd cast a spell over him, and he was helpless against it.

Nora only smiled. "If this were the old days, it might be the truth you speak, for the old bards could make magic with their singing, but we've forgotten the way of it. You cannot blame it on a spell, Michael, for I don't know how to cast one. I've only the powers of music, though that's a strong enough power. It was one of my ancestors who sang Silken Thomas to his rebellion against the king, and if music could drive a man to hate, it might also

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lead a man to love."

They were married three months later, and though there were those in Kilrana who prophesied doom for the poor, plain Nora, Michael was faithful to her until the day he died. Once he'd heard Nora sing, he never saw another woman.

Which is not to say that Nora had no rival, for she did, but it was such a one as generations of Irish women have learned to their grief that they cannot hope to fight; if Michael loved anything more than his wife, it was Rosin Dubh, the Dark Rosaleen, Ireland herself, and the dream of freedom. He was not a violent man, was Michael, and he hated bloodshed, but the cause of Irish unity has seduced many another, and there was enough of the poet in him to make him one with the likes of Pearce and Connelly. He put aside his dreams of peace, and faced the necessity of war, and he joined the I.R.A. And it was Nora, who loved Ireland almost as much as she loved Michael, who waited at home, hoping to God he'd be back from the latest raid.

It was hard on her, the waiting and not knowing. She was not the kind of woman to whom waiting came easy. In the days gone by, she'd have taken up steel and fought beside her man like the old queens, or at the very least would have ridden into battle singing curses at the enemy as the ancient bards did. She knew why Michael fought, and she wanted the same thing, but there were many lonely nights when she wondered if the dream was worth it. How many had died in the long centuries since a faithless woman's adultery had brought Strongbow to Ireland, how many more would die? Was there any real hope of winning, when the English had a trained army and they had only their willingness to die? Sometimes, late in the night, she wanted peace more than she wanted freedom, and Michael at her side instead of off murdering some other woman's husband. It was at a time like this that her sorrow at not being able to give Michael the children he longed for turned to a fierce joy, for at least she would not have to send her sons out to fight and die beside their father as her mother had done.

They had been married for nine years when the Easter Rising brought the terrible vengeance of the English upon that small band who seized the General Post Office in Dublin. It also brought a tightening of the chains as patrols searched for any Irishman thought to sympathize with the rebels. The Black and Tans, recruited from the dregs of the British army, and some even from the English prisons, roamed the countryside, and they weren't particular whom they shot. Nora knew it was only a matter of time before they came for Michael, but he would not run away to America, as others had done. If he had to die for his dream, he was willing to do so.

It was a rainy October night that

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the knock came, and voices ordered them to open up. Nora stayed at the hearth, still strumming her harp, but she watched warily as Michael unbolted the door.

"Good evening to you, Lieutenant, and what brings you out on such a night?" he asked pleasantly.

Lieutenant Roger Baldwin pushed him aside and strode in, his muddy boots leaving a trail of footprints across Nora's shining floor. Now not all the English soldiers in Ireland were terrible men, and many did their jobs with misgivings, but there were men who took pleasure from their dirty work, and Roger Baldwin was such a man. He hated the Irish, and he liked to kill, and so he never thought twice about shooting an Irishman, because they were all rebels anyway.

"What would you be wantin' with me, Lieutenant?" Michael asked again.

Baldwin smiled, and it was like watching a wolf bare its fangs. "I've come to take you in, O'Donnell. We know it was you who held up the convoy three nights ago, and now you'll pay for your treason."

"I've committed no treason. And I held up no convoy. Certainly not on Wednesday night. I was in the pub, and there's a dozen men who'll say so."

"A dozen men who'll lie for you, you mean."

"They'll not be lying," said Nora. "He came home after midnight, drunk as a tinker at a fair, and singing at the top of his lungs. I thought I'd die for the shame of it, and him the schoolmaster."

"Save your lies, the pair of you. We have a signed confession from Paddy Flynn, saying he shot the driver, and naming you as leader." He smiled at Nora, but his eyes were as cold as the hand of death. "So you'll not get away from us this time. We've the confession of a dying man, taken before witnesses. You'll spend tomorrow night in Kilmainham, with the rest of your friends."

"What did you do to Paddy to get him to lie? I wasn't there, I tell you, and I can prove it."

"I doubt that." He gestured two of his men forward, and pulled his pistol from its holster. "Take him, men. I advise you to come quietly. I hate to kill a man in front of his wife."

"I'll come. Give me a minute to kiss Nora good-bye." Without waiting for an answer, he pulled her to her feet and took her in his arms and kissed her on the mouth. For a long moment he held her, and said softly, "I loved you, Nora, but I can't let them take me. I'd no wish for it to end like this...."

"Take him!"

"Nora, I...."

The troopers tore him from her arms, but Michael broke free and made a desperate headlong dash for the door. Nora stood frozen, watching, knowing what was going to happen but unable to look away. He couldn't let them take him, torture him into confessing like Paddy. There was brief

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rain of bullets, sharp and sudden, then all was silent as Michael fell, lay dead in the doorway of his house.

Baldwin walked over, and kicked him tentatively. "Dead. That's one less of the scum. Let's get on our way, men, we're finished here."

"If this were the old days, I would have made a satire against you, I would have woven a spell so strong you could not have stood against it," said Nora, and her voice was tight with anger and loathing. "But this is not then, and the druids and the bards are long gone from Ireland, and you have stolen our powers as surely as you have stolen our heritage and our land. Get out of my house, Baldwin, and leave me to mourn my husband in privacy."

Baldwin shrugged, and stalked out, muttering something about superstitious sods. His men followed him.

Nora watched them leave, stony-faced and dry-eyed. She would not allow them to see her grief. It was too precious a thing. It was all that held her together, that pride, but it kept her back straight and her tears unshed until she heard the last of the lorries drive off. Only then did she run to Michael. He lay half in, half out of his house, his blood mingling with the rain in the muddy ground. Uncaring, she knelt in the mud, and cradled his head in her lap.

"Michael, he'll pay for this, I promise you, my own love. If I have to call up the Devil himself, he'll pay for killing you." She bent to kiss him, and reached up a gentle hand to close his staring, blue eyes. "I swear it on your body, Michael O'Donnell."

She was never certain how long she knelt there, keening bitterly, but it seemed only a moment or two before she rose and clumsily dragged his heavy body into the house. With loving hands, she washed the blood and mud from him, and dressed him in clean clothes, and laid him out on the bed. She crossed his hands on his breast, and placed a rosary in them, then kissed him one last time.

"Michael agra, I'd like to stay at your side this night, and keep watch over you, but there's something I must do before dawn."

Michael was dead and gone from her, but there were the others to think of. Baldwin would be arresting them, too, for surely Paddy Flynn had named them as well as Michael. He'd take them to Dublin, and they'd disappear into Kilmainham until they were tried, then they'd be sentenced to long terms if they were lucky, but most likely they'd be shot or hanged as rebels. And the worst of it was they were all of them innocent of the charges, but no one would care. She had to stop Baldwin. She had to see to Michael's men, and that was more important than her grief. But how could she stop them? She didn't know how to shoot a rifle, even if she had one at hand, and one woman couldn't stand against a convoy. If only this were the old days....

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She thought of her ancestor prodding his reluctant lord, Silken Thomas, and then she knew what she would do.

She went to the fireside, and picked up her harp and she began to play. She played the laments and the battle songs of her family, the proud Geraldines. She had been raised on tales of the shining heritage of the Fitzgeralds, of Garrett Mor and Earl Thomas, of the Earls of Desmond and Kildare, of all those arrogant, brave men and women who have bowed their heads to no one but God, and who ruled like kings until Henry VIII had Silken Thomas and his uncles killed on Tower Hill in far-off London. She sang, and she sang, and it was an old, old song she sang, the very song used by the Geraldine bard to prod Silken Thomas into action when he hesitated. He had come before the Council to demand the truth about his father, for rumors said Garrett Og had been murdered in London, but declaring war upon Dublin Castle made even fierce and hotheaded Thomas hesitate. But the urging of his bard called him back to his duty, and he had flung down the sword of the justiciars of Ireland, declaring, "This sword has drunk the blood of the last Geraldine!" and rode off to gather his forces.

"Thomas," called Nora softly, and in the flickering light she had the look of a queen. "Silken Thomas, son of Garrett Og, of the line of Fitzgeralds, I name you my blood-kin. A man lies dead in this house, and his blood calls out for vengeance. I call you here, as blood of my blood, to avenge him for me. Come to my call, Silken Thomas, or I will sing of your cowardice over the length and breadth of this land."

It seemed then as if the wind began to howl, and the flames burned blue in the hearth, and the room grew cold, cold. Then the shadows of the doorway grew darker, and thicker, until they formed a shape, that of a young man, armored, with silken fringe decorating his gleaming helm.

"Who dares to call me coward, who died for Ireland in an English prison?" he asked softly, but though his voice was quiet Nora's heart quailed at his anger. He moved forward with fleet arrogance, his hand resting warily on the sword at his belt. "Harper Woman, I am he they call Silken Thomas, the son of Garrett Og, and I led the Saxons a merry dance all over this land, and if they'd not had guns we would have beaten them and chased them out of Ireland like so many frightened rabbits. How dare you call me from my grave to brand me a coward?"

"I did not call you coward. I only said that a man who would let the husband of his kinswoman lie unavenged would deserve to be called so. You must know I have the right of it, Thomas, my cousin." She looked across at him, her sad eyes meeting his burning gaze. "I called you to me to ask for vengeance for my husband."

"You are blood of my blood, but centuries lie between us. Surely there

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is one closer to you who can get your vengeance for you."

She shook her head. "The English have done to me as they did to you. My father, my brothers, they are all dead in the fighting, and my sister's husband will not lift his hand against the English — the law, he calls it. My man's family is gone also, scattered like the wild geese, and his men will soon be dead or in prison, if we do not act. There is only you, Lord Thomas, you and no one else. Give me the lives of those who killed my Michael. Give me their blood."

The room was very still. Nora could hear the crackle of the flames in the hearth and she forgot to breathe, so aftraid was she of breaking the stillness. At last a cold, mirthless smile crept across Thomas's mouth, and he began to laugh.

"A great jest you make, lady, to ask the dead to give you death. So be it. I, too, die unavenged. I shall get my own vengeance, and yours, too. But I cannot do it alone. There must be others. Call them here, and I will lead them."

Then she began to play the war songs and laments of all the great old families, and as she played, she named them, and they came. First she called forth those from her own family, all the Earls of Desmond and Kildare who had fought the English crown during their lifetimes, Thomas's father and grandfather, and the uncles who had died with him, Edward Fitzgerald, and a score of others. Then she played Carolan's great march for Brian Boru, and he came, a great, tall man in a mail shirt, surrounded by the son and grandson and the great chieftains who had shed their blood at Clontarg. She played for the men of the O'Neills, Hugh and Shane, and the rest of their clan, and for Hugh Roe O'Donnell, and Wolfe Tone, and Robert Emmett, and the Sheares Brothers. Last of all, she sang a new song, and the men who had died in the Post Office joined that band of ghosts who crowded into Nora's small house, filling it, and spilling out the door into the yard. Then she let the sounds fade, and her fingers lay still upon the harp strings.

Silken Thomas looked out at the gathering of warriors around him. "We all have one thing in common. We are united in one thing, and that is our love for the land that gave us birth. We are from many centuries, and many clans, and we have fought each other as often as we have fought the English, but now this woman calls us here to avenge a fallen hero. I ask you, do we stand together this one last time?"

The shout of agreement that broke from them shook the rafters, and the glimmering firelight flashed against their arrogant, angry faces, and on the shining steel of their blades and rifles. Thomas turned to Nora. "Harper Woman, will you lead us to the place where we can make our stand against them?"

And so she led her ghostly troop

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across the fields, harping as she went, her clear voice floating before them like a banner as she sang one of the fierce war songs — the war song of her husband's family.

Many a heart shall quail
Under its coat of mail
Deeply the merciless foeman shall rue
When in his ears shall ring
Borne on the breeze's wing
Tyrconnell's dread war cry, O'Donnell's ABU!

They took it up, and sang with her, even those to whom English was not a familiar tongue, and Nora did not think it strange that Brian Boru should know the words to a song that had not been sung until long after his bones turned to dust. They came at last to the junction of the Dublin road, and she knew that Baldwin would have to pass this way with his lorryloads of prisoners. In the cold light of the moon, they waited, and the only sound that disturbed the silence was the music of Nora's harp, and the fierceness of her song. Then there came the sound of a convoy.

They formed a solid line across the road, a barricade of ghostly flesh, their swords and pikes and guns at the ready. Baldwin had no choice but to order a halt. He was not prepared for the sight of threescore of men in costumes he had not seen except in the history books, brandishing weapons that belonged in a museum but which shone bright as new.

A sane man would have thought twice before he tried to order about a troop of men who were not quite solid in the moonlight, but Baldwin was not sane. He was ruthless and he was angry. "Give way, you scum, or we'll shoot you where you stand!" he shouted.

They did not move, and Silken Thomas said quietly, "Your bullets cannot hurt us, who have already died at the hands of the Sassenachs. We have come for English blood, and we have waited long for our vengeance."

He ordered his men to fall out, and to fire, and they raised their rifles, and they pulled the triggers, but the line of warriors did not give way, for the bullets passed through them. The English learned quickly that while their guns might not harm the ghosts, Irish weapons could draw blood, though they were wielded by phantoms. The battle raged, and Baldwin stood frozen in the midst of it, until he saw Nora, standing in the moonlight, a look of unholy joy on her thin face. Only then did he begin to understand what she had done.

"Send your devils back to hell, woman."

But she only smiled, and her hands moved over her harp strings, and her voice pealed like a bell over the noise of death and slaughter.

He leveled his pistol at her. "Call them off, or I'll send you to join them."

"You'll shoot me as you shot my husband. It takes such courage to kill an unarmed man or a defenseless wom-

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an. Kill me if you like, Baldwin, I've no reason to live with Michael gone."

His hands were shaking so hard that he had to hold the gun in both sweaty palms, but he managed to squeeze off two shots. The impact sent Nora reeling backwards, and the front of her dress turned red with her blood. The harp fell from her hands, and for a moment, but only a moment, her voice was stilled. Then a shadowy Nora rose, holding a harp like the one that lay splintered on the ground, and still she sang, though he had killed her.

At last all Baldwin's men lay dead around him, and he crouched on the ground surrounded by corpses and ghosts. Silken Thomas strode over to him, and stood looking down at him, his eyes filled with contempt as if he regarded an animal too low to deserve kicking. "We'll not kill you, Saxon, you're not worthy of a hero's clean death, and none of us care to sully his blade with the blood of such as you. Go, tell your king how you lost a troop to men who have lain in their graves for centuries. And give him this, and say that the Geraldines still wait for Ireland's freedom."

He threw his sword at Baldwin's feet, and spat, and faded into the night. One by one they came, those dead warriors, and each threw down his weapon, and spat, and then departed. The last to stand before him was Red Hugh O'Donnell, and he said, "Tell your king that this was done to avenge one of my blood." As he threw down his sword, he gave a great shout, and it was the war cry of his clan he shouted. Then he took Nora's hand and said, "Come, Harper Woman, your man waits for you. I will bring you to him."

And as they walked away, arm in arm, Baldwin heard Nora's voice raised in a song of victory, and then the singing faded, and he was all alone.

ANSWER TO MARCH ACROSTIC:

Quotation: Through her helmet the electrical waves of her brain directly drove the equipment for which she was responsible, in a control system that worked a large fraction of a second faster than any dependent upon arm-length nerves. "It's going to come again."
Author and work: Fred Saberhagen, BERSERKER MAN

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This moving story, about a young man who has lived alone for 22 years in a monitoring station, is one of a series of stories based in the domed city of Springfield, each using the voice of a deceased American writer, here John Steinbeck. "O. Niemand" also wrote "The Wooing of Slowboat Sadie," (F&SF, September 1982).

The Man Outside

BY

O. NIEMAND

Many of the people on Springfield are in transit, although some are moving through the big dome faster than others. A certain number of them arrive on the rock in a desperate hurry to get somewhere else, looking for connecting passage to fortune or freedom or love or some other glittering fancy. They wait in clutching haste for fate to fill the inside straight of their happiness, but instead they find themselves the new taxpayers and inmates of a town under glass. The hope that loaded their hearts dwindles as steadily as the money that they put aside to buy their way into their own future.

A few will surrender easily, supposing that Springfield is as good as anywhere else they might have gone. More of them, though, fight the idea because, at first, life under the dome has a narrow look. After a while these people will see where they've made their mistake. Springfield is a green bottle full of gentle crimes and virtues, of men salty with sin and sweet with illusion.

Right up against the inside of the dome, as far to nightside as you can get from the hub of Tammany Square, there is a double handful of ancient shacks. The families that live here call the place Easy Street. The shacks have a noble history, though no one but the tenants themselves would give you a plastic penny for the whole neighborhood. When the workmen were building the dome they had to live somewhere, and they threw up a little community of self-contained shelters. The shacks were intended to be temporary, and when the dome was finished over them they were abandoned. Most of them were torn down and the workmen went off to another rock and another job. Some stayed on Spring-

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field, dreaming of the town that would eventually come to join them. So the men and women and kids of Easy Street are the descendants of the pioneers, and they own a certain liberty because their grandfathers found an edge in being there first.

All human settlements come furnished with people who don't need to work for a living, or don't want to. Some men are lazy and good-for-nothing to their wives, but happy enough with themselves. On Springfield there are the jickies who live in the hulks and wrecks of starboats in the ruins of the Old Field, people who have learned through sad experience that social contact causes sickness in their stomachs. And there are the families on Easy Street, who are unique on Springfield in their situation. They toil not, neither do they spin. They live well enough on dividends from the banks, and most of them haven't the faintest idea where it all comes from.

Only Jerome lived outside the dome, completely alone. He had lived in the little building out on the dead black rock for twenty-two of his thirty-seven years. He was average height, as fat as a puppy. His hair was pale yellow and wild. He tried to keep it under control by cutting it with a knife every few days, but it just stood up on his head like a fistful of straw. He had soft brown eyes that his mother said at the time of his birth were just a little too far apart. That was the nicest thing she ever said about him. His fingers were short and stubby, and his flesh hung on him in folds and rolls. He moved in a slow waddle around his lonely domain.

The building Jerome lived in was a monitoring station for one of the dome's power plants. It was stuck among the sharp black crags about a mile from the dome's nightside portal. Jerome had been born on Easy Street to a woman named Daisy. A lot of babies born on Springfield are named after flowers and birds that no one there has ever seen. Jerome, though, received as his only legacy the name Daisy thought belonged to his father. He had been a happy baby, happy all the time, rarely crying. Daisy thought that was very nice. Everyone remarked on how happy Jerome was. As the baby got older, the charm of Jerome's happiness began to wear off. He was too happy, even for Easy Street. He was happy when he was hungry, happy when he was tired, happy even when someone smacked him across his drooling face.

When he was fifteen years old one of the other boys on Easy Street told Jerome that a girl named Fawn liked him. Jerome was a shy boy driven into himself by his mother's words about his sluggish wits, and by his neighbor's comments about his fat little face. He knew who Fawn was. She had eyes as blue as heaven and a smile that had nothing to do with cheerfulness. Jerome felt lucky just living on Easy Street near her. He wondered that she

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felt the same about him.

"She's waiting for you in the shed in the alley behind Buzzy's," said Jerome's friend.

"Why?"

"She wants to kiss you."

"I don't want to."

"You got to, Jerome. She's waiting for you."

Jerome felt his face flush. He tried to think of a way to go home but his thoughts moved too slowly. He had the early flicker of an idea, but by that time it was too late. He and his friend stood outside the shed.

"Go on in, Jerome."

"I don't want to."

"Sure you do. She likes you, Jerome. Don't you like her?"

"I guess so."

"Then go on in."

Of course there were more of Jerome's friends waiting inside, along with the temptress Fawn. And what they did to him in there was supposed to be a joke, one of the common cruelties of children. But Jerome's mind was stunned by the terror and the shame, and as he ran home in tears he thought only about going away. Daisy tried briefly to learn what had happened, and made a small attempt to comfort him. Jerome had few belongings to take with him. He had a gilt wooden crucifix and a notebook.

Jerome put on a venerable pressure suit, took a bag of clothing and food and his few treasures, and went out the nightside portal. He had a secret place on the cold face of Springfield where he liked to go to be by himself. He went to the monitoring station, cycled himself in, climbed into the twisted knots of pipes and conduits, and wept until the memory of the pain faded away.

He liked the monitoring station because there was no one there to tell him what a ball of fat he was, or how he was dumber than a bucket of mud. No one ever came to the station except Jerome. It was his favorite place.

There were several old pressure suits on Easy Street left over from the construction of the dome, but Jerome was the only person who used them. He was the only one who could bear to leave the security of the dome. Everyone else was terrified by the unenclosed space, by the blackness of the sky, by the stark shadows and loneliness. Jerome was blithely unware of these things. If he thought about them, probably he, too, would have been afraid.

So Jerome lived for twenty-two years in the monitoring station. He took care of the things he needed by making trips back to the dome. Whenever he appeared at the portal to be let in, the news spread back to Easy Street. It was always a special event on Easy Street. Everybody would run to the portal, no matter if it was dinnertime or the middle of a pinochle game. They all wanted to see Jerome. If their whole life on Easy Street hadn't already been one long holiday, his appearance

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would have made a nice break in their dreary lives.

When he was twenty-eight years old, after he had lived in the monitoring station for thirteen years, he came to the dome after an absence of five months. The mob of people was bigger than ever, and they were all talking and laughing as though they were waiting for a parade with bands and floats. Jerome didn't recognize anyone in the crowd. He had forgotten most of the children he had played with, and the others had changed too much. A young woman — maybe Fawn herself — stepped out of the crowd. "Daisy died," she said.

Jerome just looked at her blankly.

"Your ma. Your ma's dead, Jerome."

He just wrinkled up his brow as though he were trying to figure what to do with the news. Then he pushed past the young woman.

"Never mind," said someone else behind her. "You can't tell him a damn thing."

"Well, hell," said the young woman.

Though he lived alone and never spoke to any of the people inside the dome, Jerome was never lonely. That was because he had a friend in the monitoring station to talk to. His friend was Jesus. He had been a gift from Daisy. His mother had given Jesus to the boy without knowing what she was doing. Once, when Jerome was only eight, she said that God was going to punish him for something, for being so fat or so dumb.

"Mama?" he said.

"What you want?"

"Who's God, Mama?"

Daisy was just a little surprised. She thought she had told her son all about God. "Why, God is Jesus," she said.

"Jesus?"

"Yes, and Jesus will be with you all the time, everywhere you go. He'll watch everything you do, so be careful."

That scared Jerome, but Daisy explained that Jesus was good and kind and would send Jerome straight to Hell only if the boy did something specially dumb. So Jesus was with him in the monitoring station, and Jerome was happy to have him there. He figured that talking to Jesus kept him from going crazy.

He liked to write poems, too. He discovered poetry when he was eleven years old. The book was an anthology of best-loved poems, and it was the only book on Easy Street. It had a vital occupation: it kept Daisy's humidifier and heat exchanger level. The book had been wedged under the unit for years and years, forgotten by its original owner, ignored by everyone in all the decades since. Jerome noticed it one morning when he was lying on the floor, staring at a pattern of cracks in the wall. He replaced the book with a brick and spent the rest of the day puzzling out the poems. He could read if no one

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told him he had to, and he could decipher simple stories. Poems left him bewildered and charmed. Most of them made no sense at all, but he loved the flow of words and the bright, gemlike images. It took Jerome more than a year before he realized that he could invent his own poems. He had a notebook filled with them.

Once, after reading a poem by Joyce Kilmer, he sat in the monitoring station and listened to all the noises. There was a constant, regular rhythm of sound from all the machines and equipment, percussion in the pipes and ducts, clicking and banging and whirring of fans, and sudden crescendos of racket that meant something in the place had just decided to function. Jerome never heard the sounds anymore unless, like now, he felt thoughtful and unsure where to put his attention. He looked at the book again and remembered the poem about trees. He looked around the monitoring station all chrome and clear plastic and pale green walls and white ceilings and green tiled floors. There had been no trees on Easy Street, and there was nothing alive on the face of the asteroid. Jerome grasped his thick blue pencil in his fat fingers and wrote:

A Poem
By Jerome, Age 37

I think that I shall never see
A tree.

"That's real nice," said Jesus. "But it makes me feel sad."

"It *is* sad," said Jerome. "It makes me sad not to see trees."

Jesus was very kind and understanding. "But your home here is real nice, too. You don't have trees, but it's warm and clean here. You have all these blinking lights and jiggling dials to watch. No one hurts you here."

"Maybe someday I can have a tree," said Jerome.

Jesus laughed. "Sure," he said, "maybe someday."

"I don't really want a tree."

"Sure, I know," said Jesus. That was another wonderful thing about Jesus: he always knew just what Jerome was really thinking.

Sometimes Jerome wondered where Jesus lived. Daisy had told him that he lived in Heaven, but she couldn't tell him where Heaven was. She always said, "Up there." Jerome didn't know what she meant. The only thing "up there" was the roof of the dome, and he knew nobody could live on the roof of the dome. And anyway, how could Jesus get from the dome to the monitoring station without a pressure suit? So it seemed to Jerome that Jesus must live in the station, and that it had been very generous of Jesus to let Jerome come to live there, too.

Not long after his verse about the tree, he was talking to Jesus about the poem. He was trying to write another one. He had written

A Poem

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By Jerome, Age 37

I like to go out in the darkness

"I guess I got to change that," said Jerome to Jesus. "You got to know how poems work. Well, I can't think of nothing that sounds like darkness: barkness, tarkness. See? I got to change it."

"I tell you what you can do," said Jesus. "What you can do is leave off the 'ness' part. Leave it just dark, see? That way there are plenty of words that sound like it. 'Lark,' see? And 'snark,' and 'mark.' And maybe others."

"What does 'snark' mean, Jesus?"

Jesus looked thoughtful for a little while. "I don't exactly know," he said. "But there's somebody in your book of poems who uses it."

Jerome started the poem again from the beginning.

I like to go out in the dark.
There isn't a daisy or a lark.
There's just the rocks and the hills

"I'll tell you something else," said Jesus. "You put 'daisy' in it. That was your mama's name. Maybe you ought to of put something else there."

"Yeah, I guess," said Jerome slowly. He crossed out the word *daisy* and wrote in *flower*. "There isn't a flower or a lark," he said. "There's just the rocks and the hills."

"It's real nice," said Jesus.

Jerome looked impatient. "It ain't even done yet," he said.

"Oh," said Jesus.

"I need just one more line, and it has to end like hills."

"How about this: 'All nice and plain without no frills.' "

Jerome made a face that showed what he thought. Jesus was a good friend and he was always good to Jerome, but Jesus really didn't understand poems. "I don't know," said Jerome.

"Why not?"

"I just don't know if I like it. Maybe I want to try something else."

"Well, you go ahead and try something else, and if you don't find nothing else, you can always use it."

Jerome's expression grew sly. "I can always change hills," he said. "I can swap it for the rocks. There might be better words that sound like rocks."

"You just go ahead then," said Jesus. He looked a little hurt.

Jerome decided to put the poem away for a while. It wasn't important enough to make trouble between him and his only friend. He had other work to do. He had to make a list of the things he needed, and make another visit to the dome. He walked around his eremitic estate, checking his stores.

The monitoring station was a small, rectangular building, alone and lonely, set just inside the permanent nightside of Springfield. It had been put there to oversee the circulation of

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cooling water through the labyrinth of conduits of one of the dome's principal reactors. There were thousands of switches and lights and dials, thermometers and radiation dectectors and pressure guages, valves that opened or closed whole thoroughfares of pipe, valves that worked other valves, all too complex for any person, or any team of people, to comprehend. But computers did all the actual monitoring. There were accommodations in the station for a maintenance crew, but it had been a long time since anything there had needed maintenance. It had been so long that inside the dome there weren't any people who knew how to operate the machinery. Everything was written out in handbooks and manuals, though; the books knew what to do, but no people did.

There was a small dormitory in the back of the building, but Jerome never used it. He was frightened to live and eat and sleep so far from the airlock. One day, shortly after he had come to live in the station, he took his pencil and notebook and drew a picture of the control room. There was a wide, curved bank of equipment on a shielded platform overlooking the tangle of ducts and shafts. On the map he had written MY ROOM. He drew a bed and a chair that would serve him as a dresser and another chair. He dragged a mattress from the dormitory room and put it on the floor of the control room. He positioned two of the swivel chairs just as he had drawn them on his map.

The shower room was located on one side of the dormitory room, and a small service kitchen beyond that. There was a large storage area in the kitchen, and Jerome kept all his food in clear plastic containers. He always knew when it was time to go to the dome to get more.

There was really nothing else to see. There was nothing that made the place home, no pictures on the walls, not even a little rug on the floor. Everything was functional and drab, but that was the way Jerome wanted it. He wasn't threatened by drabness. And he had his poems on a chair beside his mattress, and he had Jesus anytime he needed a friend.

"So you're gonna go to the dome this afternoon," said Jesus, just trying to make conversation.

"Yeah," said Jerome. He was struggling into the old pressure suit.

"Goin' to get supplies?"

"Yeah."

"Wish I could come."

"I wish you could, too. There's not much to do when I'm walking across the rocks and stuff."

Jesus cast around for some way he could go to the dome, too. "I know what you do," he said at last. "You bring me back another suit. That way next time I can go with you."

"Can't carry no suit. It's all I can do to carry the supplies."

That made Jesus unhappy. "Then maybe sometime you can go and just get a suit, and don't worry about no supplies."

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Jerome looked up. It was a good idea. "I can do that, I guess," he said. "But I don't like to go there more'n I have to."

"I know you don't. But you'd go to get me a suit, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, I would," said Jerome. He was all ready to leave now. He waved to Jesus and walked clumsily to the air lock. He let himself out, and then he was all alone under the eternal midnight sky and the hard, frozen stars. The dome was a bright green glowing thing a mile away. Jerome turned towards it, and he could see lights in the ruined hulks at the Old Field. Daisy had told about the people who lived there, but he couldn't remember anything about them. He started walking. It would take more than half an hour to cross the fissured ground.

He climbed jagged rills of black stone like the jaws of monsters, and lowered himself carefully down into the flat gray plain that separated the nightside station from the dome. His fat little body labored and his breath wheezed in the suit's helmet. When at last he got to the dome's portal, he pressed the signal and waited to be let in. He knew what would be waiting for him. He knew there would be a crowd of people from Easy Street. He hated that part.

The airlock crew grinned at him but offered no other greeting. He stepped in, waited for the cycle to finish, then emerged into the greenish glare of the dome. He stripped out of the suit and hung it in the air lock's waiting room. He didn't like it in the dome, even though he was born here. He didn't like the temperature, he didn't like the colors, he didn't like the smells or the noises.

"Hey, Jerome," yelled a woman, "what you want this time? You want to get married, Jerome? I got just the girl for you!" Everybody in the crowd laughed. Jerome smiled and pushed his way through.

"Jerome," called another voice, "what you do out there all by you'self?"

"I don't see how he can stand it out there."

"Hard to b'lieve he's Daisy's. She used to be partial to company." There were some more knowing laughs.

Jerome went to the store on Easy Street and gave his order. Everything was paid for by deducting the cost from his account at the bank. Jerome didn't even know he had an account at the bank; it had been Daisy's, but since she died it was his. He carried his supplies back through the crowd to the lock, trying not to hear what the people were shouting at him. He was glad to put the suit on again and leave the dome. He was glad he wouldn't have to come back again for four or five months.

He was halfway home when he remembered that he should have asked about another pressure suit. He hoped that Jesus would forgive him and not send him straight to Hell for it.

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While Jerome was working his way back over the last of the sharp stone ridges, a voice spoke to him in his helmet. "Jerome?" it said.

"Jesus? Where are you?"

"What? Jerome? Is that you? This is Arency Diga, the supervisor of Reactor No. 2. We have a little problem, Jerome."

Jerome didn't understand how someone could be talking to him in his helmet. "Where are you?"

"I'm in the dome. I'm talking to you over the communicator in your suit. We need you to help us, Jerome."

"Why?" asked Jerome in a frightened voice.

"Some of the machinery in the station where you live needs to be worked by hand. It isn't anything to be worried about."

"Is this a joke? I don't like jokes. That's why I come out here."

Diga was getting impatient. "Listen to me. If you don't take care of this, we'll have to send out a crew and they'll be walking in and out of your station all day, bothering you until they get it fixed. You don't want that, do you?"

"No."

"Then let me know when you get to the station. I'll describe what you have to do."

"Okay," said Jerome. He could hear Diga talking with another man.

"Where are you?" asked the other man.

"Who are you? Where did Mr. Diga go?" asked Jerome.

"Mr. Diga is right here. My name is Meern. I'm in charge of reactor security."

"Well, I'm almost home now. What do I got to do?" Jerome started the air lock cycle. When the outside door opened, he carried his bags of supplies inside.

"There is large control box on the long dayside wall of the station." It was Diga's voice again. "There are three—"

"Jus' a minute, Mr. Diga," said Jerome. "I got to put my stuff away first."

"Jerome! Listen! This is very important. We don't have time to send a crew out there. If you don't take care of this soon, highly radioactive water will begin overflowing and flooding through the pipelines into the dome."

"All right, Mr. Diga."

"Don't go inside the station. Look for the control box—"

"I'm already in the station, Mr. Diga." Jerome put down the bags in the kitchen. Jesus stood and watched, saying nothing, a perplexed expression on his face.

"God damn it," said Meern. "Jerome, you have to go back out. As fast as you can. There's a control box—"

"Okay, okay," said Jerome. "I'm goin' back out right now." He cycled himself through the air lock and walked around the building. "The long dayside wall," he murmured.

"That's right," said Diga. "Do you see the box?"

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"The big metal thing with the yellow stripes on it?"

"Right, that's it. Now, open the door. Just pull open the three little latches and swing it open."

Jerome didn't have any trouble doing that. "Okay."

"Now, listen carefully Jerome," said Diga. "There are a lot of things inside the control box."

"There sure are." Jerome hoped that Diga and Meern knew what they were talking about, because he knew he'd never be able to make sense of the complicated system he was looking at.

"Do you know what a Tyler switch is, Jerome?" asked Diga.

"No."

"It looks like a little ball with shiny silver stuff in it. There ought to be a whole lot of them in the control box. Don't touch any of them now. Do you see them?"

"Oh, sure, I see 'em."

"Good, Jerome. Now, you see there are four sections of switches and warning lights and things."

Jerome backed away a step and looked at the control box. If he looked at it kind of sideways, he could see that everything was arranged in four sections. "I see," he said.

"Now, count over to the second section."

"You want me to skip over the first one."

"That's right, Jerome. Now, about in the middle of it there will be a Tyler switch that says Feedwater Bypass One. Do you see that one?"

Jerome looked carefully at the first few switches. They were all labeled, but he couldn't make any sense out of their names. After he read four of them, he forgot which one he was looking for. "What does it say, Mr. Diga?" he asked.

"It says Feedwater Bypass 1. Do you see it?"

"Not yet, Mr. Diga." He went down the column. "Here it is," he said at last. "You want me to turn it?"

"Not yet, Jerome," said Meern's voice. "Do you see, right under it, there's one called Feedwater Bypass 2?"

"Sure," said Jerome, "and there's 3 and 4, too."

"We want you to turn all four of them, one at a time, starting with No. 1. When you turn it, wait for us to tell you to turn No. 2. Okay?"

"Oh, sure, Mr. Meern."

"Go ahead, Jerome. Turn No. 1."

Jerome grasped the crystal globe with the thick, clumsy fingers of his pressure suit. It turned easily; the silver fluid in the globe stayed at the bottom, but a little flower of electronic components rotated out of the pool. When Jerome turned the switch, a light went off in the control box. "I did it," he said.

"Good boy. Now turn No. 2." Following their directions, Jerome turned the other switches.

"Is that all you wanted?" he asked.

"Just one more thing, Jerome," said Diga. "Shut the door on the control

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box and go inside the station. We need you to open a valve."

"Okay," said Jerome. He shut the control box and went back inside.

"What are you doin'?" asked Jesus. He looked a little unhappy that he wasn't part of the excitement.

"The people in the dome want me to do some things," said Jerome. "I'm being some kind of hero."

"But you don't like the people in the dome."

"These people are okay. They don't talk like the people on Easy Street."

"Oh," said Jesus. He watched Jerome climb out of the pressure suit and put it in a locker.

"Jerome?" Diga's voice came over all the loudspeakers in the monitoring station. Jerome had never heard the speakers in use before.

"Here I am," he said.

"Good. Go up to the control room."

Everything inside the station was quiet and peaceful. Jerome wondered why Mr. Diga and Mr. Meern sounded so upset. "I'm in the control room," he said. He sat on one of the swivel chairs.

"Jerome, I want you to listen carefully again," said Diga. "We're going to start at the right end of the curved row of equipment panels. Do you see the big green screen with the wavy lines going up and down?"

"Sure," said Jerome. He watched it every night before he went to sleep.

"Just to the left of that are two panels with red, green, and yellow lights, and a lot of square meters with arrows in them. Do you see them?"

"Yeah," said Jerome. This wasn't much fun at all.

"Okay. Good boy. Now keep going to the left. Do you see three long rows of little silver switches? There's a sign that says Pressurized Relief Valve Intake Lines."

"It says what?"

"Pressurized Relief Valve—"

"Intake Lines," said Jerome. "Here they are."

"There should be a big metal thing, a round thing like a faucet handle, just to the left of those switches. Do you see it?"

"I see it right here," said Jerome.

"There's a sign on it, Jerome. What does the sign say?"

Jerome squinted his eyes. This was like the things Daisy used to do; when he made a mistake, she beat him. He was afraid of Diga and Meern, wherever they were. He was afraid that they'd beat him if he did something wrong. "There's a sign that says Coolant Drain Shunt. What does that mean? What does 'shunt' mean?"

"Never mind, Jerome. Turn the handle clockwise as far as it will go," said Diga.

He hesitated, his hand on the valve handle. "Do it, Jerome," said Meern. "We don't have a lot of time."

Jerome turned the handle.

A bell rang.

Almost immediately a loud, stri-

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dent alarm klaxon began to sound somewhere else in the station. A whole row of lights lit up an angry red on the panel above the valve. There was a loud, furious hissing and a rapid clanking that Jerome had never heard before.

"Oh, my God!" cried Meern. "Jerome, you turned it the wrong way. You've got to close it, Jerome."

But Jerome was already running down from the control room. Jesus waited near the network of pipes and ducts. "What'd you do, Jerome?" he asked.

"I don't know." Jerome's face was drawn and white. His voice shook.

"They're gonna to be mad at you now," said Jesus, nodding his head sagely.

"I know."

There was a terrible grinding noise and one of the small-gauge lines ruptured. Water sprayed all over the floor of the station. Another line broke, and more water flooded down on the tiles.

"I got to clean this up," said Jerome. "They'll send men out here if I don't clean this up."

"They're trying to talk to you," said Jesus. Diga and Meern were trying frantically to catch Jerome's attention.

"I don't care," said Jerome. "They'll send men out here if I don't clean this up. How'm I gonna stop the water comin' out?"

Jesus didn't dare answer.

"Jerome!" shouted Diga. Jerome looked up. "Listen, Jerome! You have to turn the valve off, or you'll pump all the water in the system into the station. We'll have to shut the reactor down now anyway, but if we lose much more water, it will start to heat up. There could be a terrible accident unless you close the valve."

"There's water all over here, Mr. Diga."

"I know, Jerome. But unless you close that valve, a lot of people in the dome may die."

"Die?"

"Yes. Go to the control room and turn the valve the other way."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Diga. I didn't do it on purpose. It was an accident—"

"Yes, yes. Just go up there. He probably doesn't even know what 'clockwise' means."

Jerome ran up to the control room. He put his hand on the valve. "Which way do I turn it?"

Meern answered. "It will only go one way now, you son of a bitch."

Meern was right. Jerome turned the valve, and some of the red lights went out on the panel. "I don't want you talking to me like that," he said. The alarm bell didn't stop clanging, and more lights lit up on other panels.

"Is that it? Did he do it?" asked Diga.

"Yeah, finally," said Meern. "The system is pumping back up towards normal."

"I just thought of something awful," said Diga. "Jerome, don't take off your pressure suit. Leave it on.

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That water is —"

"I already took off my suit. Do you want me to put it back on?"

There was a long silence. Jerome went to the locker to get his suit. "I can hear the poor bastard splashing through the water," said Meern. "Oh, God."

Jerome put on his suit. Jesus watched him accusingly; Jesus still didn't have a suit. Jerome turned around so that he couldn't see Jesus' face.

"What are you going to say to him?" asked Meern.

"I don't know," said Diga. "But we owe him something. If he hadn't been there, I don't know what would have happened. We couldn't have gotten a crew there in time. We might have lost the dome. Jerome, can you still hear me?"

"Sure I can, Mr. Diga."

"He's got his suit on now," said Meern. "You can hear the difference."

"Jerome, listen to me. That water is very dangerous and you have to get out of there. You're going to have to leave the station and come to the dome."

"He can't do that, Arency," cried Meern. "He's so contaminated, he'll light up the nightside like a Christmas bonfire."

"His only chance is to get medical care as quickly as possible. Jerome, can you gather up everything you want to bring with you? You're going to have to live in the dome for a while, until we can clean up the station for you."

Jerome sloshed through knee-deep water below the control room. Jesus walked beside him with a reproachful expression. "I don't want to live in the dome," said Jerome.

"I know that," said Diga, "But you have to. You'll get very sick if you stay there."

"I will? What about Jesus?"

There was a long silence from the dome. "Jesus?" asked Meern.

"Yes," said Jerome. "What about Jesus?"

"Is Jesus there with you now?"

"Yes," said Jerome.

There was another pause. "We'll send a surface car for you," said Diga. "We'll take care of Jesus later."

A third voice interrupted. "I won't authorize any of our cars to go," it said.

"But we owe him something—"

"We're just going to have to write off that station. It won't cool down until this whole rock is nothing but radioactive dust floating around in space. He saved some lives and he cost us a monitoring station. We're going to have to shut down Reactor No. 2 until we can build another. I'd say we were even with him. If he wants, he can walk here."

"That's crazy!" said Meern. "He's—"

"Did you hear that, Jerome?" asked Diga. "You're going to have to get here on your own. Can you do that?"

"I don't think I want to. Not without Jesus." Jesus smiled at him; Je-

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rome was glad Jesus wasn't angry.

Diga didn't know what to say. "I told you we'd take care of Jesus. And we'll take care of you."

"Do I have to go back to Easy Street?"

"Not unless you want to, Jerome," said Diga.

"I don't want to." Jerome went up to the control room and took his book of poems and his notebook and his gilt crucifix; then he came back down to the air lock.

Jesus looked mournful. "I'll never see you again," he said.

"Sure you will," said Jerome. "But we got to go live in the dome."

"I don't see how come."

Jerome never lost his patience with Jesus. He knew that sometimes Jesus had a hard time understanding some things. It was up to Jerome to explain them. "Because the water is poison water," he said.

"I won't drink none," said Jesus.

"Well, it ain't just that. It's bad water, and they said they're going to bring a surface car for you and a suit and everything. I'll wait for you inside the dome, and we'll find someplace to live where nobody'll bother us. Maybe we can go live out at the Old Field. People can live out there, you know."

"Maybe," said Jesus. He didn't seem very happy about the idea.

Jerome waved good-bye and left the station. He started the long walk across the sharp-edged rocks that separated him from the nightside portal. In a while he began to feel very sick. His head began to throb and his whole body hurt. His skin felt like it was burning, as if someone had sandpapered it until it began to bleed. He got very weak. The dome towered above him, not a quarter of a mile away, but Jerome had to sit down right in the thin gray dust that covered the plain. "Oh," he said. It seemed to take all his strength.

"Jerome? Are you still there?" It was Meern. He sounded surprised.

Jerome paid no attention. "Jesus loves me, this I know," he sang in a small voice. " 'Cause my mommy told me so."

"Jerome?"

After a few minutes he stood up and continued walking. Only a few yards from the portal, the awful nausea began. Jerome vomited in his pressure suit. He fell to his knees just outside the portal, and retched until it felt like his eardrums were going to burst. He saw flashes of red and white light, like stars exploding before his eyes. He was finally able to stand and stagger the short distance to the portal. He pushed the signal.

There was no response.

"Hello!" he called. "It's me, Jerome. Let me in."

No one answered. He looked up, and a man turned away from the port, pretending not to see him.

"Let me in!"

At last a voice spoke in his helmet. "Jerome," it said, "why don't you go

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back to your station? We'll send a surface car for you as soon as we can. We're very busy right now. We can't let you in because we're just so busy. Go back to your station and we'll send a car just as soon as we can."

"Did you send a car for Jesus?"

"What?"

"It *was* a joke, wasn't it? I *said* I didn't like jokes." Jerome sat down in the dust beside the portal. He was in terrible pain. He didn't understand why he hurt so much. He wanted to cry, but Daisy always slapped him when he cried. He just sat in the dust and tried to breathe. It even hurt to breathe.

"We'll send a car, Jerome."

"You won't, will you? You won't send a car." There was click in his helmet, the noise of the communications link being broken. From then on, there was nothing for Jerome to listen to but the sound of his own breathing.

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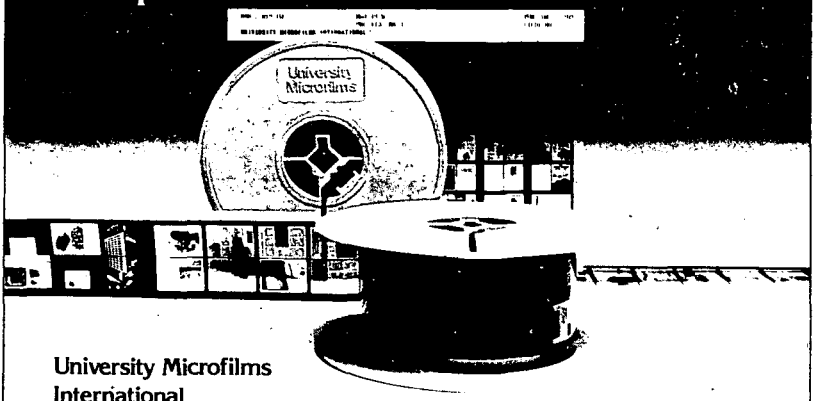

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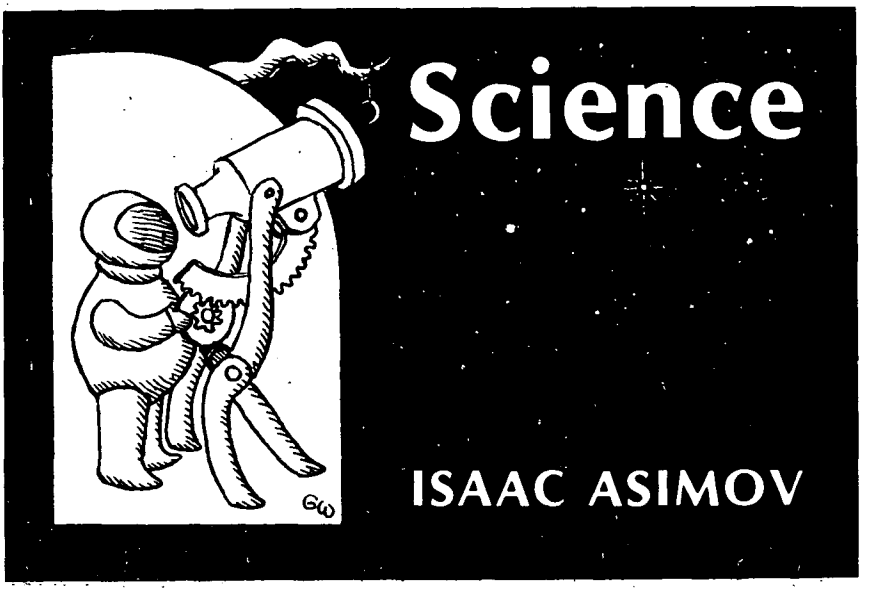

Drawing by Gahan Wilson

DEAD CENTER

I received a letter today from someone who, knowing I lived in New York City, wondered how anyone could possibly bear to live in a large city, or *any* city. He himself (he said) lived in a town of 5,000 people and was planning to move to one of 600 people.

You can well imagine how indignant I grew at this.

My first impulse was to reply and tell him, haughtily, that the only advantage of living in a small town was that it robbed death of its terrors. But I fought that down and didn't reply at all.

To each his own!

And yet it seems to me that there must be something in each of us that feels a certain yearning for "centeredness." A large city is the center of a region. Beyond it are the "outskirts," the "suburbs," the "hinterland." The words themselves indicate that the city is the essence, while everything else is subsidiary.

I get a certain pleasure in knowing that I live not merely in a city but in Manhattan, the center of New York City, a region so unique in many ways that I honestly believe that Earth is divided into two halves: Manhattan and non-Manhattan.

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I even boast that I live at the very geographical center of Manhattan, though that is not exactly true. The actual central point is in the aptly-named Central Park, and, as nearly as I can determine, I live about half a kilometre west of that point.

Nor am I alone in this "centrocentric" attitude. Statisticians go to a lot of trouble to figure out the exact geographical center of the United States. (If you're interested, the geographical center of the 48 contiguous states is in Smith County, Kansas, near the town of Lebanon. If you add in Alaska and Hawaii, the center moves northwestward to Butte County, South Dakota, west of the town of Castle Rock.)

You could easily find the center of any region, nation, continent, or ocean. I suppose that anyone in the world can carefully select an area in such a way as to place himself in the center of something. (The county seat of Smith County, Kansas is in the geographical center of that county and proudly calls itself Smith Center.)

That minimizes the pleasure of centrocentrism, however. If everyone can be at the center of something, where's the value?

We have to stop fooling around and figure out some way of deciding the center of the Earth itself, something unique to the entire world.

In the days when people thought Earth was a flat disk with the sky coming around on all sides to meet it at the horizon, it must have seemed to each person that he himself was at the very center of the world. It didn't take much of an advance in sophistication, however, to come to the realization that there was more to Earth than that which was visible within the circular horizon. The "egocentric Universe" had to be dismissed.

Nevertheless, there was resistance to thinking the center to be very far from one's own feet. If one was not the center, then one's culture ought to be — in particular, the most highly regarded spot related to that culture, if there was one. Thus, the ancient Jews were quite certain that Jerusalem was at the center of the Earth and placed the precise central point at the Holy of Holies within the Temple at Jerusalem.

The Greeks, for very similar reasons, felt that Delphi was at the center of the Earth and placed the precise central point at the cleft over which the Pythian priestess sat, inhaled the fumes, and made the incoherent sounds that were translated into prophecies.

And (not entirely jokingly), the old Yankee Brahmins thought Boston was at "the hub of the Universe" and placed that hub precisely at the State House.

I suppose every group devises a "culturocentric Universe," either literally or symbolically.

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The fun was ruined when it turned out that the Earth was not flat, but spherical (not *exactly* spherical, but let's not quibble). The surface of a sphere has no center.

To be sure, a *rotating* sphere has two special points on its surface, the North Pole and the South Pole, but each exists in such an undesirable location that they lose their value. No one would feel any special pride in living at either pole; nor would anyone be moved to establish a central religious shrine at either.

Quite arbitrarily, we divide the Earth's surface into degrees of latitude and of longitude, and there is a unique place which is at 0° latitude and 0° longitude. That is the result of human convention, however, and is located in the Gulf of Guinea about 625 kilometres due south of Accra, the capital of Ghana. Who is going to establish a religious shrine in the ocean?

There are other arithmetical coincidences that might be drawn upon. For instance, a mere 130 kilometres due west of the Great Pyramid is a point which is at 30° north latitude and 30° east longitude. There are people who have seriously suggested that the ancient Egyptians had some mystic purpose in building their pyramids near the double-thirty. (Of course, it wasn't double-thirty till some 4200 years after the building of the Pyramids, when the British set up the Prime Meridian so as to make it run through Greenwich Observatory near London for decidedly culturocentric reasons of their own. The double-thirty Pyramid connection boils down, as so many things do, to coincidence, and it would take near madness to argue anything else.)

What it comes down to is that, when dealing with a sphere, we must abandon the surface altogether if we want to be sensibly centric. We must deal with the true center, the dead center, which is equidistant from every point of the surface. The center of Earth is 6,378 kilometers straight down, no matter where you are standing (provided you consider Earth a perfect sphere and ignore the equatorial bulge and the minor unevennesses of hill and dale.)

None of us has the privilege of living at the center of the Earth (or wants it), but then, none of us is closer to the center or farther from it than anyone else by any significant amount, and that is just as good. If we are "eccentric" (in the literal sense), we are all equally eccentric.

The ancient Greek philosophers were the first who had to deal with spherical Earth, and they continued to do their best to make the Universe as egocentric as possible. (I don't blame them, you understand. I would surely have done the same.)

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They made the center of the Earth the center of the Universe as a whole. They eventually visualized the Earth as surrounded by a series of concentric spheres which held, in turn, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the stars, in that order, moving outward. The center of each of these spheres coincided with that of Earth.

The mathematics that had to be used to predict the position of the planets in the sky against the background of the stars, on the assumption of such a "geocentric Universe," was worked out by Hipparchus of Rhodes about 130 B.C. and perfected by Claudius Ptolemaeus about A.D. 150.

There were some Greek astronomers, notably Aristarchus of Samos and Seleucus of Selucia, who disagreed, but they were ignored.

It was not until 1543 that the Polish astronomer Nicolas Copernicus was able to show that the mathematics used to predict planetary positions could be simplified, if one assumed that the Sun were at the center of the Universe in place of Earth. This would make it a "heliocentric Universe."

Copernicus thought the Sun was surrounded by concentric spheres which held Mercury, Venus, Earth (and its attendant Moon), Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the stars, in that order, moving outward. The center of each of these spheres coincided with that of the Sun.

This was not just a matter of placing particular individuals off-center, as in the case of a culturocentric Universe, or even all people off-center, as in the case of a geocentric Universe. The vast Earth itself was placed off-center, and it therefore took fifty years for astronomers generally to accept the heliocentric Universe. (If we put it to a vote of the Earth's population generally, even today, I think heliocentrism would still lose out.)

In 1609, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler did away with the spheres altogether. He showed that the actual movement of the planets across the sky could be better explained by supposing them to be moving in elliptical orbits, and this view of the Solar system has been retained ever since, with only the most minor of refinements.

Ellipses have centers, as circles and spheres do, but the center of ellipses that mark the planetary orbits do not coincide with the center of the Sun. Rather, the Sun is at the focus of each ellipse, that focus being to one side of the center.

In 1687, the English scientist Isaac Newton presented his Law of Universal Gravitation, and from that it could be seen that the Solar system, as a whole, had a center of gravity. This center of gravity might be considered as motionless, while all the bodies of the Solar system (including the Sun!) revolved about that center in a fairly complicated fashion. The Sun was

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much nearer to the center of gravity at all times than was any other body of the Solar system, so that, as a rough approximation, one could still say that all the planets revolved about the Sun.

The center of gravity was often so far from the Sun's center (more or less in the direction of Jupiter) as to be beyond its surface; but, on the scale of the Solar system, to have the center of gravity of the system as much as 1,000,000 kilometres from the center of the Sun means little, as we can still view the Sun as approximately the center of the system.

Nevertheless, it is the center of gravity of the Solar system that is at the center of the Universe in the Copernican sense, and we ought to speak of a "systemocentric Universe" rather than a heliocentric one.

It was fair enough to speak of a systemocentric Universe even in Newton's day, since (for all anyone knew) the stars might be evenly distributed around the Solar system and might all be affixed to a thin solid shell (or "firmament") just beyond the farthest planet. That certainly fit the appearance (and perhaps a majority of the Earth's population still believe this).

Nor did the discovery of the true distance of the planets, and of new members of the Solar system — new planets, new satellites, myriads of asteroids and comets — in itself affect the systemocentric view. That had to hold as long as the firmament existed, no matter how far off it might be or how diverse or numerous the objects within.

The first blow to the firmament came in 1718, when the English astronomer Edmund Halley noted that at least three bright stars, Sirius, Procyon, and Arcturus, had changed their positions markedly since Greek times. Other astronomers detected such changes in position for other stars.

It became clear that the stars were not fixed to the firmament, after all, but crawled along it at various speeds and in varying directions — which made it doubtful that the firmament existed at all. It became possible (indeed, almost irresistible) to suppose that the stars occupied a volume within which they moved randomly, like bees in a swarm. If all moved at about equal speeds, those closest to the Solar system would seem to move most rapidly, while those farthest would seem to move so slowly that the motion would not be apparent even over extended periods of time.

In 1838, the German astronomer Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel worked out the distance to a star for the first time. The distances to other stars were quickly determined. It turned out that even the nearest star is 1.3 parsecs away. The distance from the Sun to the nearest star is 9,000 times as great as the distance from the Sun to the farthest large planet. Other stars are much farther away still, clearly hundreds, perhaps thousands of parsecs away.

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Nevertheless, if the stars were finite in number and were distributed with spherical symmetry about the Sun (however great their distances might be) the Universe might still be systemocentric.

Consider—

All the objects in the Solar system, including the Sun, revolve about the center of gravity of the Solar system. (Some objects, the satellites, do so while revolving about the center of gravity of a particular satellite system. Thus, the Moon and Earth revolve about the center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system, and each is carried along as that center of gravity revolves about the overall center of gravity of the Solar system.) The objects in the Solar system need not be revolving all in the same plane. To be sure, the planets very nearly are, but if you include the asteroids and comets, the revolving objects form a thick spherical shell about the center of gravity of the Solar system, with the Sun very near that center.

In the same way you can imagine all the stars (each perhaps with an attendant system of planets) revolving about the center of gravity of the entire star-system, and if that center of gravity coincided, or nearly coincided, with the center of gravity of the Solar system, then the entire Universe was still systemocentric.

Of course, the larger the Universe proved to be and the more certain it was that it consisted of millions of stars each rivaling the Sun in size, the less reason there seemed for that Universe to be systemocentric. Why should the entire vast Universe, all those millions of stars have *us* as their center, and why should all revolve about *us*?

To the religious, there would be no mystery. It was the way God designed the Universe. Indeed, from the fact that the Universe was systemocentric, one could deduce that the Solar system was of peculiar importance, and that could only be so because human beings exist there, and that this is so could only be because we are formed in the image of God. In this way the systemocentric nature of the Universe becomes a magnificent "proof" of the existence of God.

To the non-religious, the only possible response to the situation is that that is the way it seems to be and that, perhaps, at some time in the future, as our knowledge increases, we will understand the matter better.

The discomfort of systemocentrism could only be removed if there was some reason to think that it didn't exist or that, if it did, it was merely circumstance, and not part of the intrinsic design of the Universe.

For instance, suppose the Universe were infinite in size and that the

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stars stretched out forever and forever in every direction. (The German scholar Nicholas of Cusa had maintained exactly this as early as 1440.)

In that case, there would be no center. Every point within an infinite sphere has just as much right to consider itself a center as any other, and there is no privileged position at all. (The situation is precisely that of the surface of a sphere on which there is no center and no privileged position.)

If the Universe were infinite, in short, it would *seem* that we were at the center, but that would be true no matter in what planetary system we were located. (The maintenance of systemocentricity would then be as naive as an individual's view that he was the center of the Universe, because he was at the center of the circle of the horizon.)

In 1826, however, the German astronomer Heinrich Wilhelm Matthaus Olbers pointed out that if the Universe were infinite in all directions, the entire sky would be as bright as the circle of the Sun. There are a number of ways in which one might explain the blackness of the sky in view of this (see THE BLACK OF NIGHT, November 1964), but the simplest is to take such blackness as evidence of the fact that the Universe is *not* infinite in size, and the stars are *not* infinite in number. In that case, the Universe, by 19th Century thinking, *must* have a center, and the Solar system seemed to be there.

By that time, though, the German-English astronomer William Herschel had made a particularly interesting discovery.

By 1805, he had spent more than twenty years determining the proper motion of various stars (their motion, that is, relative to very dim and, therefore, supposedly very distant stars — stars too distant to show any motion at all). As a result, he was able to demonstrate that in one part of the sky the stars generally seemed to be moving outward from a particular center (the "apex"). They didn't do so uniformly, or universally; but they did so, on the whole.

In a place in the sky directly opposite to the first, the stars generally seemed to be moving inward toward an imaginary center (the "anti-apex"). The apex and anti-apex were just about 180 degrees apart.

One way of explaining this was to suppose that what Herschel had detected was what was actually happening; that the stars were moving apart in one part of the sky and coming together in the opposite part, moving around the stationary Solar system as they did so and giving it a wide berth. If that were so, what a testimony it would be to the special position of the Solar system.

An alternate interpretation of the observation is, however, possible. It

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is that the Sun itself is moving relative to the nearby stars (those sufficiently nearby to show detectable motion).

Suppose yourself, for instance, to be in the midst of a forest of randomly placed trees, each quite distant from its neighbors. As you looked about in any direction, the trees nearby would be spread far apart, but those that were far away would seem closer together. If you moved in a certain direction, the trees in that direction would be closer and closer to you as you moved and would seem to spread farther and farther apart. In the opposite direction, you would be moving away from the nearest trees and they would seem to be coming closer together.

This is a common effect of perspective, so common we scarcely notice it, unless we are little children. Our minds make allowance for it, and we are never deluded into thinking that the trees are actually either separating or coming together.

Once you think of that, it makes much more sense to suppose that the "Herschel effect" is indeed the result of the Sun moving. No astronomer supposes any other explanation is necessary. Thanks to the observations made since Herschel's time, astronomers are now quite certain that the Sun is moving (relative to the nearer stars) in a direction toward a point in the constellation of Lyra at a speed of 20 kilometres per second.

How does this affect the systemocentricity of the Universe?

If the Sun is moving, undoubtedly carrying its planetary system (including Earth) with it, then it clearly cannot be the motionless center of the Universe.

There must, however, still be a motionless center of gravity of the star system about which all the individual stars are revolving, and if the Solar system is not at that point, it nevertheless seems to be near it.

Just as the Sun moves in a tight orbit about the center of gravity of the Solar system, the Solar system may move in a tight orbit about the center of gravity of the star system. In that case, if the Universe is not systemocentric, it is nearly systemocentric.

On the other hand, it may be that the Solar system moves in a very elongated orbit about the center of gravity of the star system (like a comet moving about the center of gravity of the Solar system). In that case, for much of its history, the Solar system would be very far from the center of gravity, but *right now* it happens to be close to it. Considering the size of the Universe and the rate of motion of stars compared to that size, it would seem likely that the Solar system has been comparatively near the center of gravity of the star system for many thousands of years in the past, and will

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remain comparatively near it for many thousands of years in the future. Whatever the actual shape of the orbit, a moving Solar system means that the Universe is not likely to be systemocentric by design, but simply by circumstance, and is perhaps not even permanently so.

It is a little uncomfortable to have the Universe of stars seem to possess spherical symmetry and to have that as the only evidence of its systemocentricity. We can't see all the stars so how do we know they are *really* distributed according to spherical symmetry. It would be nice if there were markings in the sky that could help us in reaching a decision as to systemocentricity or non-systemocentricity.

There *is* such a marking, and a very obvious one. It is the Milky Way, the luminous band of fog that encircles the sky and divides it into two roughly equal halves.

In 1609, the Italian scientist Galileo, turning a small telescope on the sky for the first time, was able to show that the Milky Way was not just a luminous fog, but a vast crowd of very dim stars, stars that were too numerous and too individually dim to be made out as stars without a telescope.

Why should there be so many stars seen in the direction of the Milky Way, and so few (comparatively) elsewhere?

As early as 1742, an English astronomer, Thomas Wright, suggested that the star system was not spherically symmetrical, using the Milky Way as the core of his reasoning.

In 1784, Herschel (who was later to demonstrate that the Sun was moving) decided to check the asymmetry of the Universe by straightforward observation. It was clearly impractical to try to count *all* the stars. Instead, he chose 683 small patches of equal size that were distributed evenly over the sky, and counted all the stars visible to his telescope in each one. In a very real sense, he polled the sky.

He found that the number of stars per patch rose steadily as he approached the Milky Way, was maximal in the plane of the Milky Way, and was minimal in the direction at right angles to that plane.

It seemed to Herschel that the easiest way of explaining this was to suppose that the star system was *not* spherical, but was, instead, shaped like a lens (or a hamburger patty). If we sighted along the long diameter of the lens, we would see more stars than we would in any other direction. We would see so many, in fact, that they would melt together to form the foggy Milky Way. As we looked farther and farther away from the plane of the Milky Way, we would look through a shorter and shorter length of

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star-filled space and, therefore, see fewer and fewer stars.

Herschel called this lens-shaped star system the "Galaxy" from Greek words for "Milky Way."

If the Solar system were far from the central plane marking out the long diameters of the Galaxy, we would see the Milky Way as a circle of light confined to one side of the sky. It would look like a doughnut, with the stars more thickly strewn in the hole of the doughnut than in the wide spaces outside the doughnut. The farther we were to one side of the plane, the smaller the circle of light marking the doughnut, the more thickly strewn the stars within and the less thickly strewn the stars outside.

As it happens, though, the Milky Way divides the sky into two halves, with stars equally spread in each half. This is rather conclusive proof that we are in or very near the central plane of the Galaxy.

Even though we might be in the central plane of the Galaxy, we might be far from the actual central point of that plane. If we were, then the Milky Way would be thicker and more luminous in one half of its circle than the other. The farther we were from the central point, the greater the asymmetry in this respect.

As it happens, though, the Milky Way is reasonably equal in width and luminosity all around the sky, so that the Solar system must be at, or quite near, the center.

The Galaxy, then, would seem to be systemocentric, and since, in Herschel's time and for a century afterward, the Galaxy was thought by most astronomers to comprise all the stars in the Universe, the Universe itself must be systemocentric.

This view was retained as late as 1920, when the Dutch astronomer Jacobus Cornelius Kapteyn estimated the Galaxy (and Universe) to be 17,000 parsecs wide and 3,400 parsecs thick, with the Solar system near the center.

Yet this was all wrong. The Solar system was no more at the center of the Galaxy (despite the evidence of the Milky Way) than Earth was at the center of the planetary system.

How that was discovered will be the subject for next month's essay.

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Avram Davidson and Grania Davis — who Went West in the 1960's, along with many sf writers — have collaborated on one of the funniest Hollywood stories we've ever read: about an ordinary teen-aged girl at Hollywood High who undergoes a marvelous transformation.

The Hills Behind Hollywood High

BY **AVRAM DAVIDSON and GRANIA DAVIS**

That there *are* hills behind Hollywood — that is, behind Hollywood Boulevard and Hollywood High School — is perhaps not universally known. Smog often hides them, and tourists have no reason to look for, let alone explore, them. They remain unnoticed by the valley commuters who flood past them twice daily. Fish, it is said, do not see the water in which they swim, nor birds observe the winds which bear them.

In the late thirties, according to Life magazine, that omniscient observer of the world scene, the students of Hollywood High School were the most beautiful in the world, being the issue of beautiful young men and women who had come to Hollywood in the twenties seeking movie stardom and, although they had failed — *because* they had failed — stayed on in Hollywood doing Something Else, anything else.

Success would have removed them to Beverly Hills or Brentwood — failure prevented their return to Cowpat, Kansas; Absalom, Alabama; or Pretty Bird, Idaho. ("Diddunt *make* it in thuh pitchers, huh, Jeff? Huh, Jean? Huh huh haw!") So there they stayed, frying hamburgers on Hollywood Boulevard, pumping gas or sacking groceries on Vine. Marcelling waves or setting perms on Cahuenga, clipping hedges or mowing lawns on Selma. Or, if exceptionally lucky, working in studio jobs on the other side of the cameras.

Hollywood was their hometown now, just as Cowpat, Absalom, or Pretty Bird had been. No more profitable maybe, but lots more interesting. And the beautiful failures met and married other beautiful failures — and together begat beautiful babies, who their parents hoped *would* Make It In

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The Movies. Make It Big.

"*What?* Television, what is *that?*"

It was in the mid-fifties. The huge red juggernaut trolley cars still rolled down the alley right of way. Vibi's restaurant still advertised *Breakfast Served 24 Hours a Day*, but did not advertise the answer to the old-timers' eternal question: Was "Vibi" Vilma Bankey or was she not, and if not, who *was* she? Because the old-timers knew she was *some* movie star from the old days.

As to who was the little old lady in the short black velvet tunic and the sandals cross-strapped halfway up her shrunk shanks, nobody had an answer, or knew why she carried a cane-length silver wand: an ancient fairy in the ancient meaning of the word, she stepped her light-fantastic way and bothered no one.

Dorothy, Angela, and Luanne giggled when they saw her — but only after she had moved well on — as they giggled in confused respect when passing the old dark house smothered in foliage, which was the home of the ninety-odd-year-old widow of L. Frank Baum, the original Wizard of Oz. The original house where he had dreamed his strange — and strangely profitable — dreams.

Sometimes the three girls went to buy snacks at the all-night Ranch Market on Vine, and sometimes they went there just to stare at the odd types who went there to stare at the other odd types. Once they heard a squat woman who looked as though Central Casting had selected her as a Ma Kettle stand-in say to her equally typical Farmer-Husband: "Land sakes, Pa, what is *this?*" — holding up the scaly green fruit of the cherimoya-tree — and Pa had said: "Looks like a armadillo egg to me, Ma!"

Past the Hollywood Hotel, which presumably dated from the Spanish *Conquista*, and near Grauman's Chinese Theatre, built like an oriental shrine with hand-and-foot-prints of the famous set into cement out front for the faithful pilgrims to worship, was the business place of Angelo, the dwarf news-vendor. Sometimes they would see Angelo darting across Hollywood Boulevard to pick up a bundle of papers while he meanwhile waved a large white sheet of cardboard as a signal to drivers that he was not merely a driven leaf. Angelo had been in the movies, too.

Side by side, waving and squealing, Dorothy, Angela, and Luanne had seen *Robert Cummings* ride past in an open car with his family, and *Robert Cummings* had waved back and smiled widely — but did not squeal.

More than once they had clutched each other to see, walking on the sidewalk, just like anybody else, the movie-villainous *Porter Hall*, not looking the least villainous, looking dapper and rosy-cheeked — and *Porter Hall* had tipped his dapper hat and said: "Hello, lovely ladies!"

Lovely ladies!

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As for names even more (well ... much more) glamorous than Robert Cummings or Porter Hall — well, Dorothy, Angela, and Luanne seldom saw *them* ... in the flesh. Very seldom, though, at great and rare intervals, some of the Very Biggest Stars could be seen cruising majestically along at less than top speed. Showing the flag, as it were. Tyrone. Lana. Lauren and Bogie. Bette. Ava. Joan. Clark.

In a Company Town, people naturally hope to get jobs with The Company. In Hollywood there is no one company — there is The Industry. So, although none of their parents had ever become even minor stars, it remained the natural hope of Dorothy, Luanne, and Angela that she ... and she ... and she ... would nevertheless become Major Ones.

Outsiders, had they ever penetrated the neighborhood of squat, scaly palm trees and pseudo-Spanish stucco houses in the Hollywood Foothills, where the smog meets the ocean breezes, might have seen merely three perfectly ordinary teen-age girls — wearing fluffy bouffant felt skirts and fluffy bouffant hairdos, or pedal pushers and pageboys. One with large dark eyes and a slight, skimpy figure (Dorothy), one a tall and narrow blonde with a face marked chiefly by freckles and zits (Angela), one with a lovely complexion and a lavish bosom, but stocky hips and legs (Luanne).

To themselves, however, they were far from ordinary. They were *Daughters of Hollywood.* Moviedom was their birthright; obstacles in the form of imperfectly good looks were merely temporary. Things to be overcome. They were still at Hollywood High School, yes, but they merely endured the boring academic routine (really! classes in *English!* Like they were some kind of *foreigners!*). They saved all enthusiasm for their drama courses.

If there were diets, Luanne dieted them. If there were complexion creams, Angela creamed her complexion with them. If there were exercises, all three exercised them — Luanne for hips and legs, Angela and Dorothy for bosoms.

And — did it *help?*

Well.

Luanne at least obtained a one-shot modeling job, with her picture cut off above the hips.

Angela did get, once, an extra part in a scene at a youth rally. (Politics? Circa 1953? Bless your Adam's apple, *no!* The youths rallied for — in the film — a newer and larger football stadium.)

These opportunities never knocked again; even *so*—

But Dorothy got ... nothing at all.

Sigh

The last straw was the sign in the storefront window: *Now Signing Up! For Open-Air Spectacular! WANTED. One Hundred Teen-Aged GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS!* In she went. Surely, if a hundred were wanted, she—

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"No."

"But why *not*?"

The woman at the table heaped with application forms said, "Because, honey, *who* goes to *see* these things? Men." She pronounced this last word as though she were pronouncing "pubic lice." And went on to explain, "My dear, the average American man has never been *weaned*. If a girl is not prominent in the mammary section, if she doesn't have what is called 'a full figure,' though one might ask, 'full of *what?*' — well, Mr. Average American John hasn't gotten his money's worth, the *fool!*"

Suddenly Dorothy realized three things: first, this woman was herself of slight and boyish figure; second, this woman had somehow taken hold of Dorothy's hand, and then of Dorothy's arm, and was steadily hauling in to take hold of more and more of Dorothy; third, that she desired to be out of the place — at once.

Which, in another moment, she was.

Perhaps she should have stayed? Only perhaps not.

What she *did* do, after getting the hell out, was to walk fast. Next to walk rapidly, and next to run. Then to stumble, then to halt. And then to start weeping. She didn't burst into tears, she just wept.

And cried.

At that moment, Dorothy caught sight of her slender, tiny little self reflected in a store window. Even amidst her grief and woe she realized that, if her life had been a movie, someone would have come up behind her and asked, "Why are you crying?"

At that moment someone came up behind her and asked, "Why are you crying?"

The moment was one of genuine thrill. Mingled with its pleasure, however, was an element of alarm. The voice wasn't that of a wholesome, handsome American Boy with a mouthful of large white teeth set in a cornflakes smile; *no*: it definitely had a Foreign Accent.

Dorothy looked up. Was the man who had spoken — *was* he tall, dark, and handsome? Truth to say — not altogether. He was rather short. He was kind of dark; sallow, one might say. He had large and shining eyes. Now there was nothing wrong with all of this, or with any of this. Dorothy had long ago learned that even the most wholesome-looking of American Boys was not above urging her into some rotten old Nash or Chevy or Studebaker, stinking of grease, and then trying to Get Fresh with her. She gave a cautious sniff: no auto grease. However: something else. What? Something odd. But something not unpleasant.

"Why are you crying?" the man repeated. Impossible to guess his age.

"It's my figure," she said mournfully. "It's too thin and skimpy."

This was the strange man's signal to say, "Nonsense, there's nothing wrong

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with your figure; it's all in your mind, you have a *lovely* figure." Which would be her signal to slip away and get going. Men and boys had lied to her before, and with what result? (Never mind.)

What the strange man did say was, "Hmm, yes, that is certainly true. It *is* too thin and skimpy. About that you should something do."

So right. "I need to see a doctor," she whimpered.

"*I* am a doctor," said the stranger. In his hand he held a small, wet-glistening bottle of a brown liquid, which he shifted to draw a wallet out, and out of the wallet a card. He handed the card to her. It read:

Songhabhongbhong Van Leeuwenhoek
Dr. Philosof. Batavia.

The word *Batavia* had been crossed out with a thin-point fountain pen and the word *Djakarta* written above. The word *Djakarta* had been scratched out with a thick-point fountain pen and the word *Hollywood* written beneath. In pencil.

"I have only come down to buy this bottle of celery tonic at the deli store. Of course you are familiar with it, an American drink. I wish to have it with my *Reistafel*. How. 'Rice Table,' you would say. It is a mixed dish, such as me, self. Part Nederlandse, part Indonesian. Are you fond of?"

Dorothy had no idea if she was fond, or not fond of. She had a certain feeling that this doctor with the funny name was weird. *Weird*. But still there was the chance that he might be able to help her. If anything, it increased the chance, for everything normal had certainly failed.

"Is your office near here?" she asked.

It wasn't like other doctors' offices, for sure. It had funny things in it: skulls, stuffed things, carved things, things in bottles. *Other* doctors didn't give her a spicy meal. Was she fond of? Or not? Well, it was different.

So — "What kind of medicine do you think will help me?"

The doctor, who had been eyeing her intently, seemed surprised by the question. "What? Ah, the medicine. Oh, to sure be. Hmm!"

He got up and opened a few drawers, then took out a funny-looking bottle with a funny-looking powder in it. "In my native island Sumatra," he explained, "I was very interested in natural history and botany, zoology and pharmacology, also hunting and fishing. And so therefore. But. Details."

She eyed the powder. "Do I take it by the spoonful? Or in a capsule, Doctor?"

He was again staring at her with his odd and shining eyes. "Take— Oh, but first I must you examine," said he.

Well, what he did with Dorothy before, during, and after the examination was certainly no worse than what had been done with her by others, not that most of them had been doctors, though *this* doctor used his *fingers* fair-

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ly freely. It was ... well ... *in*teresting. And the couch was nicer than the back seat of a tatty old jalopy, and the spices and incense certainly smelled lots better than auto grease.

"Gnumph," he said, after helping her on with her clothes. "You seem in excellent physical condition, exception of thin, skimpy figure, of course. The medicine substance; it is a glandular one which I prepared myself from — but details you would not be fond. I will dilute with water," he said, moving to the sink. But nothing came from the faucet save a wheeze, a grind, and a trickle of rust.

"Ah, I had forgotten. Repairs; they had informed me. No water for a while. So. Another liquid. Not alcoholic. What? Ho!" He took up the small bottle of celery tonic. It was still half full, and he pulled the odd stopper out of the odd bottle and emptied the carbonated beverage into it. Swirled it several times. Handed it to her.

Well! This certainly beat paying a drugstore, and it was better than an injection! She closed her eyes and swallowed. And swallowed. How did it taste? A little like celery and no worse than she had expected. *Much* easier than exercises! "How much do I owe you?" she asked.

Once again the liquid look. "Owe? Oh. Please pay me with the pleasure of listening with me some of my maternally native music. Here is one gramaphone. I shall play some gamalan."

After quite some of this unusual music the doctor asked how she felt. She said she felt sort of funny; he said he would examine her again. She said she would go to the bathroom first; and then, removing her shoes and holding them in her hands, she silently left the premises of Songhabhongbhong Van Leeuwenhoek, Dr. Philosof, and went home.

After a night of odd and restless dreaming, in which she seemed to be rather high up in a greenish place with lots of grass and trees and some rather, well, *funny*-peculiar people, Dorothy awoke with a faint sick-headache. Was it—? No, it wasn't; wrong time of the month, for one thing, and it really didn't feel like that anyway. She drifted back to sleep, this time with no dreams, and awoke again. As she stirred in her bed the thought came that she *did* feel heavier than usual. The medicine! Had it begun to work so soon? She hurried to the bathroom and hopped onto the scales. As she looked down she realized two things: For one, she *had* certainly gained weight! And, for another, her feet were covered with dark hair.

"Oh, my *God!*" she whimpered and, slipping off her nightie, she turned to face the full-length mirror.

It wasn't just her feet.

It was all of her.

As far as she could see, and even in the mirror she couldn't see all of her — she had turned into a gorilla.

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It was certainly better than turning into a giant cockroach. But that was all she could think of in its favor.

The pounding on the door had been going on for a long time. Of course it was impossible to let anyone see her — and what good luck that her father had gotten one of the irregularly occurring jobs which kept the household going, and was away helping build sets on location somewhere. She'd better speak through the door. But someone was speaking through the door to *her!*

"I know you're in there, hairy!" the voice was shouting. *Hairy!* Then ... then they already *knew!* How—? Who—?

She peered through a gap in her bedroom curtain, being careful not to move it, but in vain! Though she scuttled away in terror, whoever was outside began tapping, rapping on the bedroom window. Suddenly she remembered whom she'd seen. Not "hairy"! The man was shouting for "Harry," her father!

Dorothy's mother, smelling of whisky and perfume, had vanished from their lives some years ago — but she had left debts. Lots of debts. Dad had borrowed to pay the debts, then he borrowed to pay the money he had borrowed.

The whole thing had spiraled and doubled and tripled, and then fallen into the hands of the Greater Los Angeles Punitive Collection Agency. In fact, as she tiptoed into the living room she saw that another of the familiar cards had been slipped under the door. Bang! Bang! Bang! *"I know you're in there, Harry! Better open up and let me talk, Harry! We can't wait forever, Harry!"*

On the card was printed the name of Hubbard E. Glutt, District Agent. Mr. Glutt wasn't an entire stranger. He wore a once-white shirt and a once-gray suit, both with ingrown ketchup stains, and he had extremely hairy nostrils. It could not be said, even with the best of intentions, that he was a very nice man. His breath smelled, too.

"Go away, please go away," Dorothy said through the door. She was thankful to note that her voice was unchanged. She wasn't thankful for much else. "My Dad's not in—"

"I don't care who's not in," yelped Mr. Glutt. "Ya gunna pay sompthing?"

"But I have no money!"

Mr. Glutt made a noise between a grunt and a snarl. "Same old story: 'My dad's not in and I have no money.' Huh? Still not in? Well, I gotta sudgestion." Here his voice sank and grew even nastier. "Lem*me* in, and I'll tell ya how we can, mmm, take mebbe twenny dollas affa the bill, liddle gurl, huh, huh, huh. ..."

Dorothy could stand it no longer. She jerked the door open and pulled Mr. Glutt inside. The scream had not even reached his throat when Dorothy's new-formed fangs sank into it.

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As though in a blur, she dragged the suddenly inert body into the breakfast nook. And feasted on it.

Moments passed.

The blur vanished. Oh God, what had she done? Killed and partially eaten someone, was what. But how? Gorillas don't eat people, gorillas eat bananas ... *don't* they?

Therefore she wasn't even a gorilla. She was some sort of monster — like a werewolf? A were-gorilla? Trembling with shock and horror and fear, she stared at her image in the big front hall mirror ... and gave a squeal of terrified loathing. The hair that covered her was now darker and coarser, and her facial features had coarsened, too. Her fingernails had become talons, although fragments of the Pearly Peach nail polish still remained. And examining her mouth as the squeal died away, she saw that it was full of yellow fangs. She began to sob.

How could something like this have *happened* to her? That's what girls always asked when they found themselves unwantedly pregnant — as if they didn't *know* how! But this was worse than pregnancy, a million times worse ... and besides, pregnancy had a well-known cause, and she really couldn't imagine what had caused *this*.

Then a sudden thought came, echoing like a clap of thunder, illuminated as by a flash of lightning: that ... that weird glandular-extract *med*icine which she had taken only yesterday! To make her figure fuller. Well, fuller it certainly was! But oh, at what a price! There was nothing to do but call the doctor and have him come over, and give her something to undo its effects. Only — only — would he make house calls? Well, she'd just have to see.

Only alas, she could not see. The most searching examination of the L.A. phone books, all several of them, failed to show any listing for a Doctor Van Leeuwenhoek ... however spelled. Nor could she remember a phone in his small apartment. She was afraid to go out as she was now, at least by day. At night? Maybe. If anybody found out about what she'd done to Mr. Glutt they'd have her jailed ... or even killed ... or put in a mental home. She'd have to conceal the body, run away and hide in the woods of Griffith Park, high in the Hollywood Hills, where she would roam and kill like a wild beast ... until she was finally discovered and slain with a silver bullet.

At this thought she gave another tearful squeal.

Weeping, Dorothy cleaned the blood off the Spanish-style tiles in the entry hall and kitchen with her O-Cello sponge mop, and methodically put the remains of the collection agent in a large plastic bag, which she placed in the refrigerator to eat later. Oh, how lucky that her father wouldn't be home for another week! She had until then to decide what to do. Well, at least she had enough food.

Although, between weeping and

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listening to Jack Benny, the Whistler, and Stella Dallas on the radio, and watching Uncle Milton Berle and Kukla, Fran, and Ollie cavort on their prized new television set, she grew hungry again — she realized that she had no appetite at all for the rest of Mr. Hubbard E. Glutt. Evidently she had partially devoured him out of mere rage and shock. Listlessly, Dorothy ate some lasagna instead.

And so passed the remainder of the week inside the psuedo-Spanish house in the Hollywood foothills. A few times Angela or Luanne or other friends, and twice religious representatives of two different exclusive Truths, came to the door (besides phone calls) — Dorothy said (over the phone and through the door) that she had a highly contagious flu. She gave the same excuse to the newsboy, the Avon Lady, and the highly confused Welcome Wagon Woman.

As the week's end approached with no thoughts except flight into the hills, etc., her mood became almost frantic. Then one glorious morning she woke to find the hair vanished, her body lighter, and her teeth and nails returned to normal. She hastened to replace the Pearly Peach Polish.

But ... wasn't there something *else* she had to do? The answer came at the week's absolute end, with her body again distressingly short and thin — but human. Clicking her tongue reproachfully at her forgetfulness, she dressed quickly and toted Mr. Hubbard E. Glutt's very chilled remains in their plastic sack, and deposited them fairly late at night in a public trash bin.

Dad Harry returned on schedule, sunburned and exhausted, and demanding fried chicken and beer. Then he went to bed, and Dorothy, again in her padded bra, tight sweater, bouffant skirt, and (very) high heels, went back to school. She felt relieved, she felt worried. A visit to the place where Doctor Funny Name lived disclosed empty windows and a FOR RENT sign: Would the horrible condition recur? Oh, how she hoped not! Better to remain thin and skimpy all the days of her life — and never get into the movies at all!

Luanne and Angela were happy to see her again. They chattered away about the trifling things which had happened at Hollywood High during her absence, and now and again Dorothy squealed with interest which was only sometimes simulated. Would it happen again?

Early one night, about a month later, feeling vaguely ill at ease, she went for a stroll. The malaise increased; she thought a trip to a ladies room would help, but the one in the park was now closed. There was nothing to do but go behind a bush; and it was there, as she adjusted her dress, that she felt her hands again come in contact with — a shaggy pelt. She let out a squeal of anguish. And fainted.

It was a lucky thing that her Dad was once again away, this time on his

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monthly week-long visit to his girl friend in the unfashionable section of Malibu, the girl friend's mother then making *her* monthly visit to her other daughter in Chula Vista.

Now it was impossible for Dorothy to fit into her clothes, so she made a bundle and dropped them into a debris receptacle as she passed it by. How to get home? Slinking was the only way, but as she sought out the most dimly lit streets, she only seemed to get further from home rather than nearer. And, oh! *Was* she suddenly hungry! She fought and fought against the desire for immediate food, but her stomach growled menacingly. Well, she knew how wasteful the average American family was. So of a sudden she lifted up the lid of a garbage can near a private home, with intent to delve into its contents.

No sooner had she lifted off the lid and bent over to examine what was inside, then there appeared suddenly, out of the *chiaroscuro*, the figure of a well-nourished early middle-aged man with a small moustache. He had a large brown-paper bag in his hands which looked like garbage for disposal; astonishment was simultaneous. Dorothy squealed and dropped the lid with a clatter. The man said, "Gevalt!" and dropped the brown-paper bag, then recovered it almost immediately. Dorothy would have fled, but there was a high fence behind her. In theory she could have turned upon him with tooth and fang and claw, but unlike Mr. Glutt, this man offered no gross importunity. And beneath the astonishment he seemed to have rather a kindly face.

"For a moment you had me fooled," said he. "A better-looking gorilla suit I never seen. What, you're embarrassed. Someone should see you rifling the garbage can, you should have what to eat?"

He shook his head from side to side, uttered a heavy sigh which seemed not devoid of sympathy.

"I'm not wearing a gorilla suit!" exclaimed Dorothy.

This time the shake of the head was skeptical. "Listen," said the man. "That L.A. has one weird what you might call ecology, this I know: possums, coyotes, escaped pythons, the weird pets some people keep because from human beings they don't find empathy: okay. But gorillas? No. Also, gorillas don't talk. They make clicking noises is what, with an occasional gutteral growl, or a squeal. Say. That was some squeal you gave just now. Give it again."

Dorothy, partly because of relief at finding the man neither hostile nor terrified, partly because of pride that *any*thing she could do should meet with approbation, obliged.

"Not bad. Not. Bad. At. All. I like it. I like it. Listen, why don't we do this? Come into the house, we'll have a little something to eat. I'm batching it right now; you like deli stuffed cabbage? Warming up now on the stove. Miffanwy ran away on me; luck with women I have yet to find, but hope I haven't given up yet, springs eternal in the hu-

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man breast." Gently he urged Dorothy forward towards the house.

"Sandra hocked me a tchainik by day and by night, Shelley would gritchet me in kishkas until I could spit blood, I took up with Miffanwy. We'll eat a little something, we'll talk a little business — no commitments on either side. What we'll eat is anyway better than what's in the garbage can, although gourmet cooking isn't my line — listen, you wanna know something about shiksas? They never hock you a tchainik, they never gritchet you in kishkas, they don't kvetch in public places till you could drop dead from the shame; no. All they do is cheat. Watch out for the step."

Dorothy had seen better kitchens and she had seen worse. However, kitchen decor wasn't uppermost in her mind; what was uppermost was friendly human contact; also food. The man of the house ("Alfy is the name") filled her plate with stuffed-cabbage rolls and plied her with tangerines, asked if she preferred milk or cream soda and set out some Danish, pointed to a bowl of cut-up raw vegetables and pointed out that it kept away the dread scurvy, offered her a choice of seeded rye, pumpernickel, and egg-bread.

"Where there is no food, there is no religion. Where there is no religion, there is no food. So my first father-in-law used to say. What a gonnif. Eat, my shaggy friend. Eat, eat."

After quite some time, during which they both ate heartily and, truth to tell, noisily, Alfy gave grateful eructation. Gave a sudden exclamation. "Almost missed the news on the video! Finally I broke down and bought one. Many a movie big shot it will wipe out of business, they say, but me it wouldn't wipe out. Pardon my back," he said, as he turned to watch the small screen.

Dorothy gladly did so, for quite apart from her contentment in the immediate situation, she was also pleased to watch what many still called "video," which was not yet to be found in every room of every house, rather like an ashtray.

Neither black and white screen nor sound adjusted immediately, and Alfy adjusted the rabbit-ear antennas; at length a voice was heard to say: "... meanwhile, search continues for the so-called Monster of the Hollywood Hills."

"I'll give them yet a Monster of the Hollywood Hills," growled Alfy. 'What are they trying to do with my property values? Communists! Holdupnikkes! Shut up, Alfy," he advises himself.

Two men, besides the television news personality, sat before a background of greatly enlarged photographs and plaster casts.

"Well, Dr. William Wumple of the University of Southern Los Angeles Department of Primate Sciences, and Superintendent Oscar Opdegroof of the County Police Bureau of Forensic Zoology, won't you tell us what your opinion is about all this?"

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Professor Wumple said, "These photographs and plaster casts are of the foot-and-knuckle prints of the increasingly rare Sumatran mountain gorilla of Sumatra, and—"

"I grant you, Professor Wumple," said Superintendent Opdegroof, "that there is certainly a resemblance. But the increasingly rare Sumatran mountain gorilla, a native of Sumatra in Indonesia, is vegetarian in its habitat. There is, as you know, no record of an increasingly rare Sumatran mountain gorilla, which inhabits the East Indies or Sumatra, ever having killed and eaten part of a credit bureau representive and concealed his bones in a plastic bag. The diet of this otherwise harmless creature is mostly the stalk of the wild celery plant which grows profusely on every wild mountain slope of the archipelago of Sumatra."

"Depraved appetite," said Professor Wumple, "may be found in any species. I refresh your memory with the fact that pachyderms are also herbivorous, and yet there is the classical case of the elephant named Bubi which fatally trampled and ate a young woman named Anna O. in the Zurich Zoo, who had heedlessly fed him leftover kümmelbrot from the table of her employer, a dealer in low-priced watch cases named Schultz."

The television newspersonality opened his mouth, but it and the rest of him dwindled and vanished as Alfy switched off the set. "Look, so now to business. Um, what did you say your name was, unwilling though I am to force you out of your chosen anonymity? *Dorothy?* A girl in a gorilla suit, this I never encountered before," he said, surprised; but rallied quickly. "My mother, she should rest in peace, told me that in her own younger days, if a woman so much as smoked a cigarette in the public street, she might as well have gone to Atlantic City with a traveling salesman. But now we live in an enlightened era. Lemme hear you squeal."

"Squeal?" asked Dorothy, somewhat lethargic from food and rest.

Alfy nodded. "Yeah, squeal. Use your imagination. Say you're strolling through your native jungle and you see, like, reclining under a tree and fast asleep because she's lost from her expedition — what then, a bewdyful young woman. You never seen nothing like this in your *life* before! So naturally, you give a squeal of astonishment. Lemme hear."

Dorothy, with only the slightest of thoughtful pauses, gave a squeal. Of, she hoped, astonishment.

"Bewdyful," said Alfy.

Dorothy gave him a doubtful look. "No," he said. "I mean it, I swear it. By my second mother-in-law's grave, she should soon be inside of it. Hypocrisy is alien to my nature, even though I never finished high school, but was cast out in the midst of the teeming thoroughfares, what I mean *jungles*, which are the streets of our large cities. But of this I needn't bore you, Dotty.

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—Now use your imagination again. You and this lovely young woman are going along a jungle trail in search of the mysterious Lost Temple of Gold. Her boy friend, the head of the expedition, gets knocked on the head by a falling coconut, and as he sinks to the ground, simultaneously you — and you alone — become aware that an unfriendly tribe of rotten natives are slinking through the underbrush to attack: lemme hear you convey this information to your lovely human newfound lady friend with a series of intelligent squeals."

Dorothy did her best to oblige, and in the unpremeditated fervor of her performance, began to use gestures. Alfy was immensely pleased. "We'll dub it, we'll dub it!" he cried.

She was so excited that she found herself jumping up and down and scratching her pelt.

Alfy, watching her benignly, became concerned. "Even through your gorilla suit you're sweating," he said. "let me get you some ice cubes for your cold drink." Running water over the old-fashioned all-metal tray, he turned and asked, "Why not take off your costume, you'll be more comfortable, Dotty?"

Even as she opened her mouth to repeat that she wore no costume, Dorothy observed a strange woman come running across the dimly lit dining room adjoining the kitchen; and as she ran, thus she screamed:

"I'll *give* you 'take off your costume,' I'll *give* you Dotty, I'll *give* you Shelley, I'll *give* you Miffanwy—"

"Sandra, if you hock me a tchainik, I'll—"

Dorothy reacted to Sandra with as little instinctive affection as she had to Hubbard E. Glutt; raising herself on her toes, extending her arms high and her hands out, her talons clawing and her fangs showing, she began to utter squeals of pure rage.

Sandra never for a moment showed the slightest sign of believing that she was confronted by someone in a gorilla suit; Sandra turned and fled, giving shriek after shriek of terror, horror and fright.

Dorothy pursued her down the street, sometimes erect, sometimes bounding along on all fours; till the lights of an oncoming car caused her to shinny up the nearest deciduous tree, whence she dropped upon a housetop, thence to another tree, and thence to another housetop. Until eventually she realized that she was absolutely lost.

Inadvertently scattering the inhabitants of a hobo jungle, she moodily drank their bitter black coffee and spent the night on a musty mattress in a culvert near their fire. The illustrated magazines of a certain type which those lonely and semihermitical men used to while away the hours of their solitude, she merely fed into the flames in disgust.

Much of the next day Dorothy spent in a eucalyptus grove destined

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soon to be "developed" into total destruction. She gave a lot of thought to her condition. It was no doubt the celery tonic in which the incompetent quack-doctor Songhabhongbhong Van Leeuwenhoek had administered the so-called glandular extract — containing as the soft drink must have done, certain elements very similar to the wild celery stalks eaten by the increasingly rare mountain gorilla of Sumatra — which had caused this change to come upon her. Of this she was certain.

Since it wasn't concurrent with her monthly cycle, and seemed not even to be identical with the full moon, she wondered if its occurrence might have something to do with her sign: Aries on the cusp. Vaguely she remembered hearing of a certain economically priced astrologer mentioned by her mother before she left to become an Avon Lady in Anahiem — or so her father said; perhaps (Dorothy now wondered for the first time) he had been shielding some less respectable occupation.

Her thoughts were interrupted with the utmost suddenness by the appearance in the grove of a simianlike creature who appeared equally startled. For a long moment both stood still, each staring at the other. Was this another increasingly rare Sumatran mountain gorilla? Another victim of the celery and hormone tonic? — No. It appeared to be a man in a flea-bitten gorilla suit! And it held a bottle of something wrapped in a brown paper bag.

"Listen," it said. (Or, though the voice was slightly slurred, it was a masculine voice — said *he*.) "In times past, honey, when I was a well-known star of stage and screen, I drank nothing but the best Madeira, with a preference for *sercial*, but when you're down it's all over with the imported vintages. Any kind of sneaky pete will do. Go on, my dear. Go on and take a hit." His sunken snout came so near to her face that she sensed it wasn't his first drink of the day.

The well-known former star of stage and screen took the bottle and slid the top of it up high enough so that he could uncap it and drink of its contents, and yet quickly slide it back down inside of the paper bag; for many people might object to someone blatantly imbibing alcohol in public — even in a eucalyptus grove which had formerly served as the site of a hobo jungle — for to do so is against the law.

Next, and though he had gallantly offered her a hit, he proceeded to do the following: turning slightly at an angle away from Dorothy, he fumbled his paw into his pelt and produced a second bottle, a smaller one with clear liquid in it; of this he swiftly drank and swiftly disposed it once again in a pocket of some sort; and next he took a much longer tug of the cheap wine. *Then* he offered it to her again, and as she hesitated, thinking of a tactful refusal, he said, "It's only polite to offer, but to insist would be most *im*polite."

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— And jerked it away.

His voice had become increasingly slurred, and as he lurched off down the road, Dorothy considered the possibility that the clear liquid was vodka. It was only because he half-turned his head, and inclined it as though in invitation for her to accompany him, that she followed. Grotesquery prefers company, and she thought that she might as well go along — because she wasn't sure what else to do. So follow she did.

Now and then some of the passersby looked at them, but nobody looked twice. Not only was this Hollywood, but this was the famous "Gower St. Gulch," as outsiders in the know called it. To those on the inside it was merely "The Gully."

To outsiders *not* in the know it might have seemed as if preparations were being made for the annual cattle drive to Dodge City, so numerous were the men in cowboy outfits. There was a slight stir in their ranks, seemingly caused by a dark man wearing a soiled khaki shirt and faded dungarees, moccasins and a pair of reddened eyes, who was standing on the sidewalk and shouting:

"Slant-eyes folks and Mexicans and Very Light Colored People, keep the hell outa the gully!" he yelled, in particular directing his cries to several people in war paint and feathers. "Leave the depictation of Native American Indian roles to jen-u-wine Native American Indians! — You, *you*, Marcus Garvey Doothit, professional named Marco Thunderhorse, I'm addressing myself ta *you*, don't gi' *me* no bull about yer Grandmother bein' a full-blood Cherokee Injin!"

M.G. Doothit, a.k.a. Marco Thunderhorse, gave a scornful pout and said, "All I have to say to *you*, Amos Littlebird, is that sticks and stones and arrows and musket balls may break my bones, but ethnic epithets merely reflect upon those who hurl them."

Scarcely had all this faded behind them when Dorothy and her lurching companion encountered a scowling young man bearing a sign which read: SO-CALLED "SCIENCE FICTION" MOVIES/ STOP LIBELOUS PORTRAYALS OF SO-CALLED "MAD SCIENTISTS." SCIENCE IS THE HOPE OF THE PEOPLE!

It was not yet the 1960s, but the winds were full of straws.

By and by they came to a high wire fence surrounding a barrackslike compound; and here the senior simian figure paused to drain both of his bottles and hurl them away. Then he approached the gate in, for the first time, a fairly good simulation of an apelike lope. A gray-haired man stepped out of a booth, beaming.

"Gee, good *morn*ing, Mr. Bartlett Bosworth," he exclaimed. "Only last night I was saying to my wife, 'Guess who I saw at AESSP this A.M., sugar?' And she says, 'Who?' And I told her, 'Remember Bart Bosworth who played Greeta Garbo's boy friend and also he played Mree Dressler's grown-up

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handsome son?' And she says, 'Sure! What's he doing *now*?' And I told her, 'He's imitating a gorilla for Alf Smatz, King of the D-Movies,' and she says, 'Oh gee, what a shame,' and—"

Thickly, from behind his gorilla mask, Bart Bosworth said, "Both of you just take your pity and divide it in two and then you can both shove it." And he lurched on through the gate.

The gray-haired man, no longer beaming, pointed to Dorothy and asked, "Who's this?"

"Who's it *look* like? Myrna *Loy*? My understudy."

The gateman turned his attention to other arrivals. Ahead of them was a sign reading: ALFRED EMMANUEL SMITH-SMATZ PRODUCTIONS. POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT AT POPULAR PRICES. The way seemed endless, but Bartlett Bosworth evidently knew his way.

By and by they came upon a clearing in a jungle. Scarcely had Dorothy time to express surprise in a single squeal, when Bart Bosworth, uttering a huge and hideous hiccup, fell full length upon the synthetic turf and began to snore.

This dull and repetitious sound was interrupted by a short, sharp slap: a man in the long-considered-obsolete uniform of a moving-picture director (including turned-around cap), had occasioned this by striking his forehead with the flat of his hand. "Again!" he cried. "Again! Drunk yesterday, drunk the day before — get him up! Hot coffee, bennies if anybody's got any, an ice pack. But get him *up*, get him *sober*!"

Although a shriveled-looking chap with the air of a superannuated yes-man turned round and round like a dervish, shrilling: "Right, Chief! Yes, Chief! Hot coffee! Benzedrine! A nice pack!" others were not convinced.

"-'s no use, Mr. Smatz," said the script girl.

"Wouldn't help, Alfy," called down the cameraman.

"We couldn't get him sober yesterday and we couldn't keep him sober the day before," declared a blond, youngish-looking fellow in short khaki pants and shirt, and a pith helmet.

And in a high, petulant voice, a bosomy blonde youngish-looking woman dressed similarly announced that she was "fed up with alla this stuff" — actually, she didn't say *stuff* — and in another minute would go sit in her dressing room.

"Get somebody else," advised somebody else, "for the ape part."

The man with the turned-around cap gave, through his megaphone, an anguished howl. "Even in a low-budget film no one could afford to maintain a shikker gorilla on the payroll! — Also," he said, giving the youngish-looking woman a baleful stare, "histrionics in high places I'm not appreciative of; also, furthermore, in low-budget films high places ain't so damn high. — *What*, 'Get somebody else?' *Who*, 'Get somebody else?' *Where*, 'Get somebody else for the ape

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part?' Ape-part-playing is a dying art, gorilla suits cost a fortune — and if I had a fortune would I be making D-films? No," he answered.

Then an odd expression came over his face. One hand he cupped around his ear; the other hand he used to shade his eyes. "Wait. Listen. Look. Just before shikker here, he plotzed, didn't I hear like a high-pitched squeal which clearly indicated astonishment and alarm? Sure I did. So. Okay. Who *squealed?*"

Voices were heard denying that he or she or they had squealed. Ears were cupped and eyes were shaded. ... It was very soon indeed that fingers were pointed. Dorothy, realizing that concealment was useless, shyly stepped forward.

Alfred Emmanuel Smith-Smatz — "Alfy" (for it was he) clapped both hands together. "*Dotty!*" he exclaimed. "Not only did you chase away Sandra, that yenta; early this morning I get a phone call from my thirty-year-old stepson Sammy, the schmuck: 'Mommy is so terrified she swears she'll never leave Desert Hot Springs again' — but you are *still* giving out the intelligent squeals, with *expression!* Bartlett Bosworth never got no expression in his squeals; that's the way it is with them silent screen stars: squeak, yes; squeal, no. Are you a quick study, Dotty? Yeah? Good! So take a quick sixty seconds to study the next scene. ... You got it? Yeahh! Yeay! Lights! Camera! Dolly in on Dotty, this great little gorilla lady! ACTION.! Let'm roll!"

The rest is Film History, even if much of it must be concealed from the fans and the gossip columns and the world at large. To be sure, Alfy Smatz ("King of the D-films") was a bit put out at first when he learned that Dorothy couldn't play gorilla roles week after week; but only during those weeks when the moon is full in central Sumatra.

But the month has, after all, more than one week. The first week Dorothy, in her own natural form (with artfully padded hips and bosom) plays the heroine in a science fiction film as the daughter of (despite feeble social protest) the mad scientist. The second week Dorothy is kidnapped from various wagon trains and restored to various wagon trains by, alternatively, Marco Thunderhorse and Amos Littlebird. The third week Dorothy is, first, threatened by love-starved Arabs, and second, saved from same by the noble efforts of either Marco or Amos in jellabas. — But the *fourth* week in the AESSP shooting schedule: *Ahah!*

In the fourth week of every month Dorothy stars in one *STARRING JEANNIE OF THE JUNGLE, THE WORLD'S MOST LOVABLE LITTLE GORILLA* film after another after another after another. These movies have wowed the fans in every drive-in in North America, and break records in every box office from Tampa to Tahiti;

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and, boy! How the money rolls in!

Dorothy has paid off her father's debts and retired him on a personal pension, with modest privileges at the gaming tables in the poker palaces of Gardena.

Every now and then she and her blond, youngish-looking leading man of the moment get into her lemon-yellow Pighafetti-Zoom convertible to visit Luanne and Angela. They are green with envy. Again and again, separately and together, Luanne and Angela wonder. What is the secret of Dorothy's success? It isn't looks. It isn't figure. What? What? What?

It's showbiz, is what.

Dr. Songhabhongbhong Van Leeuwenhoek has never been heard from again.

Serves him right.

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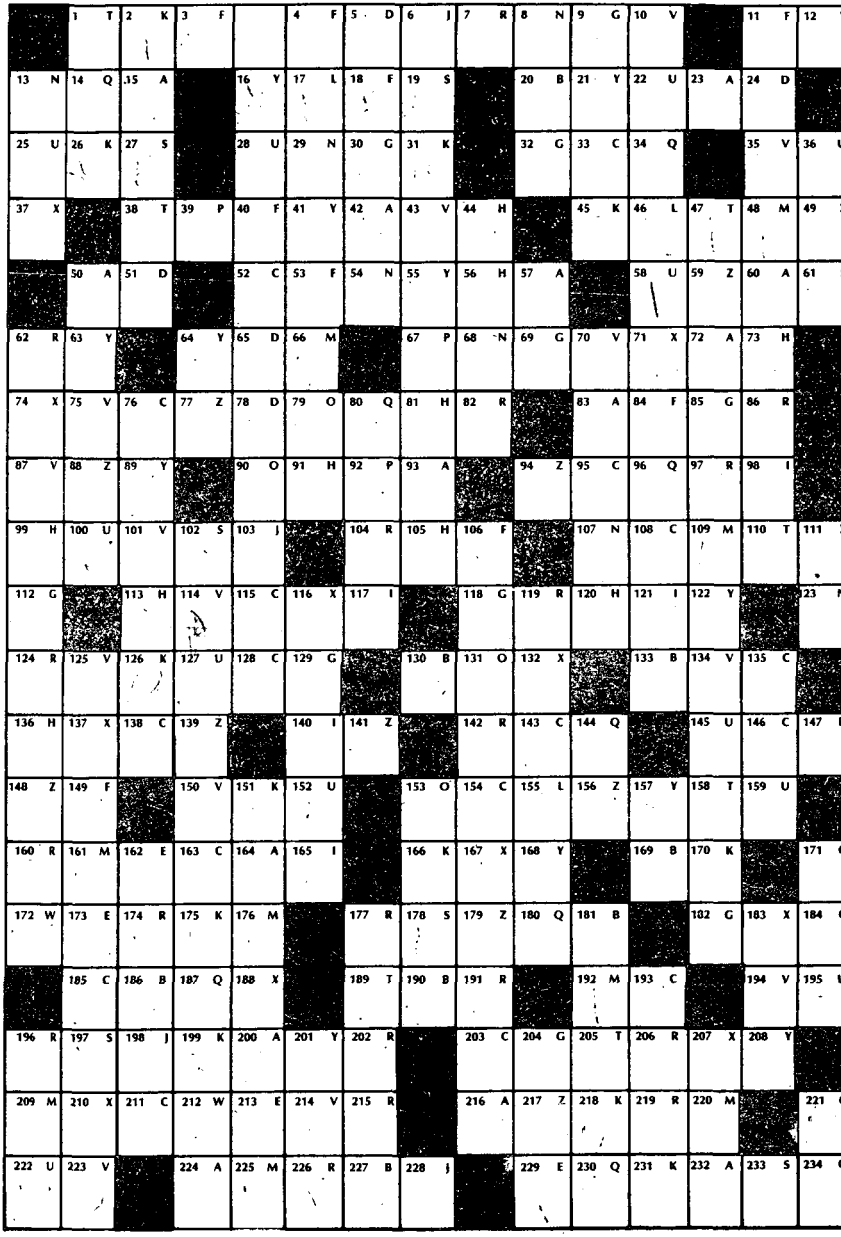

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Acrostic Puzzle

by Georgia Fillingame Adams

This puzzle contains a quotation from a science fiction story. First, guess the clues and write the word in the numbered blanks beside the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of the line is not necessarily the end of a word. Words end with black squares.) If your clue words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. If you can guess some of these words, put the letters into the blanks for the clues, over the appropriate numbers. This will help to guess more words. The first letters of the correctly worked clues spell the name of the author and the title of the sf work from which the quotation is taken.

A. Novel about Anyanwu and Doro-with last name of author.

83	50	23	57	15	72	93	42	216	200
164	224	232	60						

B. Rorschack's baby.

227	169	181	130	186	190	133	20

C. A record sale by author of R.* (3 wds.)

171	108	76	52	203	115	95	154	193	184
163	33	135	234	185	211	138	143	146	128

D. A 1957 novelette by Poul Anderson-with *The*

24	5	78	65	51

E. Author of *Systemic Shock*—last name & first initial.

213	173	229	162

F. Little stars

53	4	11	40	18	84	106	149	3

G. Centaur. (3 wds.)

30	69	9	32	112	129	182	204	221	118
85									

H. A collaboration by a Grand Master & Gunn.

81	105	91	44	113	136	120	73	99	56

I. "The _____ Elusive Brunette" by John Victor Peterson.

140	98	117	121	165

J. Novelette by Theodore Sturgeon

6	198	103	228

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K. Because of this novel (and a baby daughter) 1981 was a vintage year for Vinge.

2	26	31	45	126	170	166	199	218	231

175	151

L. "_____ on Hax" by Robert Sheckley

46	17	155

M. _____ *Unicorn*—not by Zelazny, or Pratt, or Norton.

66	48	109	161	176	192	209	225	220

N. "The _____ Stranger" by Philip K. Dick.

68	29	54	107	8	13	123

O. Where first successful spacecraft was launched.

131	153	90	79

P. In five years Barbarrosa would be crowned Holy Roman Emperor.

92	67	39

Q. Anderson's name for a raid through space by medieval warriors.

187	180	230	96	144	80	34	14

R. 1968 novella and last name of author.

160	142	7	86	119	191	97	202	215	82

62	104	124	206	147	196	177	219	226	174

S. An amoeba consists of _____ (2 wds.).

61	233	19	102	27	178	197

T. _____ *of Space* by John W. Campbell.

1	158	205	47	189	110	38

U. A Samuel R. Delany collection (2 wds.).

152	22	28	36	58	222	127	145	25	195

100	159

V. Sword wielding heroine of "War of the Wizards" trilogy.

87	35	101	214	150	194	125	10	134	70

75	223	43	114

W. Home of Baum's wizard.

172	212

X. A collaboration by a Grand Master and Pohl (2 wds.).

183	116	188	49	71	37	111	167	74	210

207	137	132

(Continued on page 162)

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(Acrostic, From page 160)

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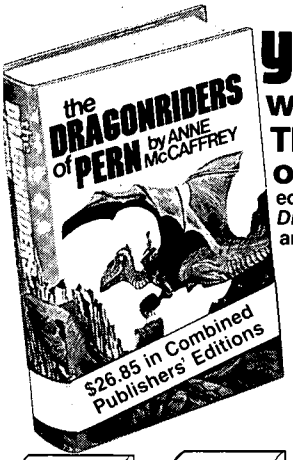

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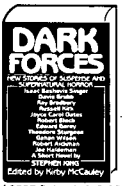

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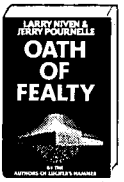

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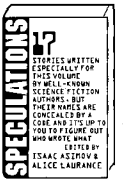
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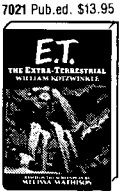

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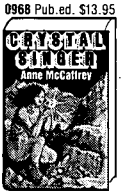

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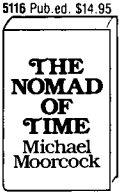

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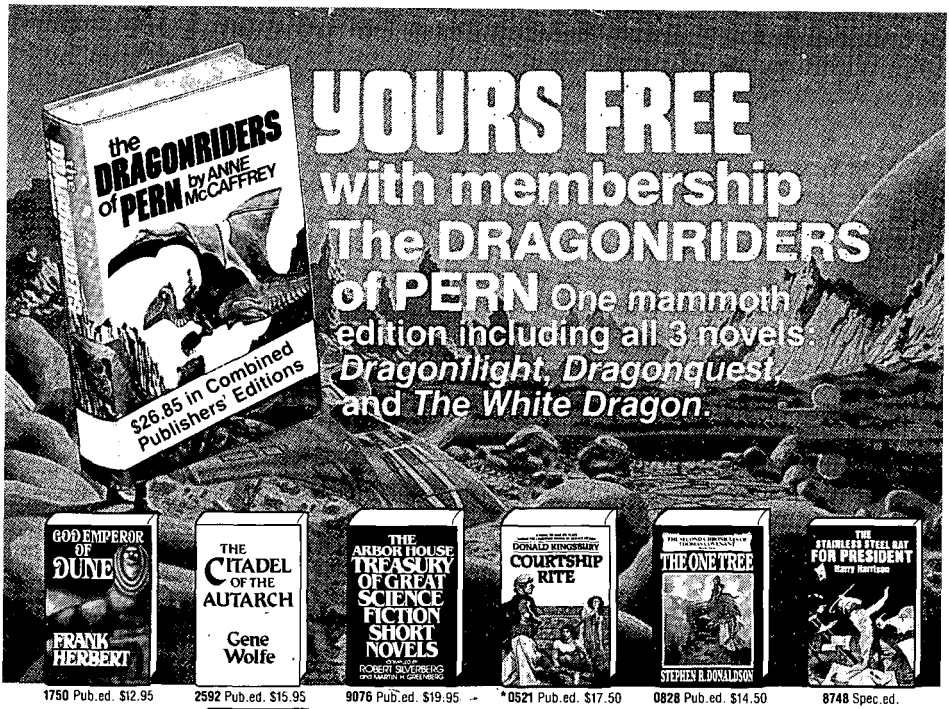
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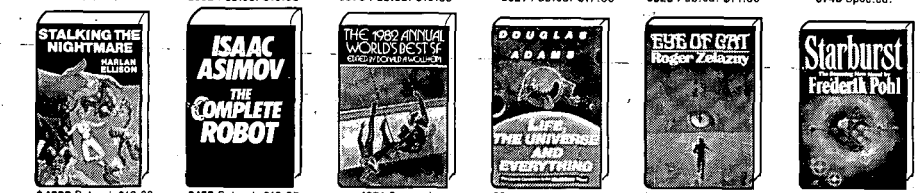

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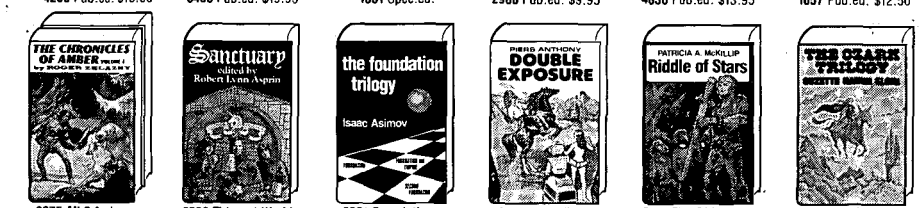

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